

# Revolutionary Perspectives

21

## Fighting Capital not



## Fighting Elections

**Class Consciousness and Political Organisations**

**Murder in the Middle East**

**Abstentionism and Elections**

**Foot & Mouth Racism in Britain**

**Macedonia Communists in the Ukraine**

**China- US Confrontation Unions in the US Mexico**

# *Revolutionary Perspectives*

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British Affiliate of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party*

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## Editorial: Recession and Riot

# Fighting Capital or Fighting the Police?

During the recent May Day demonstrations in London one group on Euston Road carried a banner with the slogan "Overthrow Capitalism and Replace it With Something Nicer". This is a fine sentiment but only a sentiment. This is the problem with the so-called anti-capitalist movement. Its supporters openly proclaim their opposition to "programmes". After all such programmes can lead to disagreements! But this lack of a defined and articulate goal can lead only to confusion. And confusion was all around for anyone to see. Whilst some protesters realise the need to smash the state they are more likely to get their own skulls smashed if they undertake the kind of minority action that took place in Central London on May Day. With 6000 heroes in blue fully tooled up for the confrontation it was a good day for the capitalist state.

They not only took another authoritarian step forward but also won the propaganda battle. The state could portray the demonstrations as simply down to mindless thugs. Even if the thugs were the ones wearing riot gear we have to ask what the point of the showdown was. Whilst the petty bourgeois so-called "anti-capitalists" like George Monbiot revealed on Channel 4 that they are not anti-capitalist at

all they do at least have a programme. They want only to make monopoly capital play according to some rules (as if they did not already write the rules). This is why they got all the positive media attention. Anti-capitalism in these terms means only a "nicer" capi-

and that the road to revolution lay not in confrontation with the capitalist state, but in making it irrelevant by everyone "doing their own thing". Autonomism is essentially a philosophy of despair. It has abandoned the working class as the one collective producer class, which has the potential to rebuild the world anew. It has abandoned communism, which is the only alternative to capitalism. Communism is not only "nice", but necessary. The entire capitalist world system stands on the brink of a new recession, which is being felt by workers in fresh redundancies. 200 000 more US workers are unemployed compared with this time last year, in Britain 15 000 have been laid off in the last fortnight alone, and this sort of thing is being experienced worldwide.

Capitalism is a daily purveyor of misery and death. Since 1945, more than 50 millions have died in wars alone, and this excludes the millions who have died in famines and preventable disasters. Every day, 20 000 children die in capitalism's periphery simply because the states they live in are paying debts rather than providing medicines. Mexico is one example. Two millions Iraqis have died in the last decade due to the sanctions imposed by US imperialism to



Quebec demonstrators against capitalism face massive state preparations at the Summit of the Americas in April

talism but it is still the same exploitative system

Although many of the participants in the anti-capitalist movement don't know it, much of their activity takes its inspiration from the autonomist movement, which began in Italy in the 1970's. Led by Toni Negri (today reconciled to the capitalist system), this argued that the working class was essentially anyone who felt oppressed by the system

safeguard its oil interests. Death and devastation rages in Palestine and in the Balkans, all in the interests of imperialism. (See the texts on Mexico, Iraq, Palestine and the Balkans in this issue.) All these crimes result from capitalism itself and express its true nature. Humanity cannot afford to put up with a system, which in the name of profit is ripping out the resources of the planet and paving the way for ecological disaster.

Despite all the obvious failures of capitalism we cannot underestimate for a minute its resilience and its hold over people's minds. Even if it is in crisis and is blatantly decaying, it cannot be overthrown simply by sections of the population rejecting it. Capitalism cannot be abolished unless those that already recognise its barbarism know what to aim for. This means a programme and an organisation to unite those that want to fight for that programme. This has nothing to do with blueprints for dictatorships and totalitarian regimes. It has everything to do with seriously confronting capitalism.

The case for communism would have been won decades ago were it not for the Stalinist monstrosity that dominated a third of the planet for half a century or more. This was not communism, but state capitalism of the most authoritarian and centralised kind. It was the opposite of the Marxist criteria for communism. Communist society is about the abolition of the state as an instrument of repression and class rule. It is about local committees and soviets linked in a system of economic co-operation of free exchange. It is about the abolition of wage labour, and the accumulation of the wealth created by that wage labour as capital, which becomes a power against the workers. It is about production for need. It is about the abolition of money, of national boundaries and the creation of one world administration (which is not a state). Like it or not, a real revolution has to have this programme which not only puts these fundamental points forward but also exposes the fake programmes of the likes of the "Socialist Alliance" which are socialist in name only.

For Socialist Alliance read "Old Labour". Just as Labour never has been socialist but has been a party for the

management of the national capital, so too is the Socialist Alliance. It calls for nationalisation of the railways and other industries. But this means that the state owns the means of production. The question then arises "Who controls the state?". And, as the answer is the same capitalists who get the subsidies (whether in private or public form) we can see that this is not a step towards socialism but a reinforcement of the capitalist class's domination over us. Today, on the eve of a General Election, when opinion polls tell us that more workers than ever are alienated from the political system, the Socialist Alliance is running around as capitalism's little helper, trying to get workers to participate in the system. For the same reason we reject the idea that the Socialist Workers' Party is anything to do with workers' emancipation. Although they denounce the old Stalinist regimes they, like all other Trotskyist groups would re-create it (except with themselves as leaders). They have now suddenly united with the Scottish Socialist Party (see our last issue for articles on all these organisations) without so much as a debate about how they reached agreement. Socialism isn't planned capitalism, nor can it come about through dishonest deals. It has to be fought for openly because it is about an entirely different form of social, political and economic organisation. And only the working class can create it.

After two decades of retreat it is, of course, predictable that many will write off the working class as has been done many times in history, even by despondent revolutionaries. After the massive increases in exploitation in the last twenty years it might be thought that capitalism would be satisfied, but not a bit of it. Now that it has had a pound of flesh, it is back for more. More layoffs are on the cards and there will be little in the way of redundancy. Workers recently laid off by Corus, the steel maker, have been told they will get compensation ... equivalent to the compensation farmers hit by foot and mouth receive for two and half dead cows! The weight of debt is hampering the placement of new capital and the take-over mergers, which fuelled the stock market, are drying up. To pay for the new recession the working class

will be called on to make more sacrifices. A new round of battle between capital and labour is in the offing. The attitude of the working class will be the key to the outcome. After years of falling figures the number of days lost in strikes in the last financial year was over 600 000 and, amongst these, wildcat strikes are already on the increase...

But the outcome of the daily class struggle can only be at best a temporary victory for the working class as long as the system of exploitation exists. The real future lies in the working class developing its own political organisations, which take the message of communism back into the class as a whole. Whether it happens in the longer or shorter term, this bankrupt system will inevitably recreate a situation in which we can once again write on our banners the name of communism with some hope of finding an echo in the class. We can then turn it from being a spectral capitalist nightmare into the realisation of a proletarian dream.

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change nothing*

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## Foot and Mouth

# A Crisis Caused by Capitalism

The foot and mouth epidemic which broke out in northern England in mid-February rapidly spread across most of the UK and then to Ireland, France and Holland. So far approximately 1550 cases have been reported and 2.5 million cattle have been slaughtered. The outbreak has been so serious that vast areas of the countryside have been closed off, food exports banned, troops drafted in to help with the killing and the bourgeoisie has postponed the General Election. Massive funeral pyres have burned across the country, and farmers have been ruined. The government has agreed to compensate farmers and so far the cost of this is £600 million with more money promised for tourism's losses.

The capitalist propaganda machine presents this epidemic as a completely unexpected crisis, which has struck like a bolt of lightning from a blue sky. If anyone is to blame, we are told, it is foreigners, possibly Chinese, who managed to import the disease with cheap meat which was subsequently fed to pigs. While the virus is obviously naturally occurring the reason why this epidemic has been so catastrophic is far from natural. On the contrary the reason is to be found in the capitalisation of farming and the techniques this has led to. This epidemic is a continuation of a series, which include Mad Cow Disease, Salmonella and Swine Fever. It has its roots in capitalism's need to produce cheap food to reduce the cost of labour power and so keep profit rates up. It is therefore a consequence of capitalism's crisis of profitability.

## Agricultural Crisis

The massive restructuring of industry and the massive increases in productivity of industrial workers, which have occurred in the last 2 decades, have also occurred in agriculture, though to a lesser degree. Real prices of agricultural products have halved

in the 25 years since 1975. This has been achieved by reducing the numbers working on the land and increasing the productivity of those remaining by using more capital intensive methods. All this has greatly increased the danger of disease and epidemics.

The reduction in rural labourers is shown by EU and Government figures. Between 1980 and 1994 the number of people in agriculture, forestry and fisheries in the EU fell from 12 million to 7 million, a drop of 42%, while in the UK the number fell from 1.27 million to 0.5 million, a drop of 60%. The actual number of farmers in the UK in 2000 was 353 000. There has also been an increase in the capital plant employed. Over a similar period from 1981 to 1993 an additional £179 million of plant and £83 million of vehicles were acquired by UK agriculture.<sup>1</sup> The efficiency and productivity principles of the factory have been applied to farming. Typically today, thousands of animals are crammed into huge sheds, fed with recycled feeds, artificially fattened (e.g. steroids), injected with chemicals to prevent disease and transported vast distances to be slaughtered or sold. All this is a recipe for spreading a disease like foot and mouth. The role of recycled feeds, which was brought to light in the BSE crisis, is notorious. Recycled sheep's brains and innards, (i.e. meat), was fed to herbivorous (e.g. vegetarian) cattle passing on a disease which was endemic in sheep which was subsequently passed on to humans. It appears that feeding pigs with waste meat may have caused the present epidemic. However, whatever started it, the conditions under which the animals

are kept and grown and the vast distances they travel for sale or slaughter ensured the disease spread like wild fire. The great extent of the areas affected by this epidemic, when compared with that of 1967, when only one area was affected, indicates the changes which have occurred in agriculture over the past 30 years.

Agricultural capital today finds itself in a weaker position than at any time since the Second World War. On the one hand it has survived with massive subsidies first from the British state and later from the European Union (EU) which have slowed down the process of capitalisation and centralisation. On the other hand commercial capital in the form of the giant supermarkets has strengthened itself and is now able to squeeze agriculture. The biggest 5 supermarkets now sell 74% of all UK groceries and can dictate prices of agricultural produce.

## Subsidies to Agriculture

In the EU farming receives about £28 billion in subsidies annually. In Brit-

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ain in 2000 the gross product of farming was £15.3bn the subsidy was £3.5bn, i.e., almost 30%.<sup>2</sup> In addition to these subsidies, agriculture is protected by import tariffs and quotas. While the average tariff on industrial products in the OECD is 4% the average on agriculture is 40%.

The subsidies to farming have two main purposes. The first is to make Europe self-sufficient in food and so prevent the food supply being cut off in a future war. The second (which is not really applicable to Britain) is to keep the rural population on the land as long as possible to prevent the social unrest which rapid destruction of small-scale farmers would bring in its wake. The subsidies have sheltered agricultural capital from competition, slowing down amalgamation of farms and increases in capital employed. By slowing down the capitalisation of agriculture, they have slowed the elimination of small holdings and have kept small-scale farmers on the land. However, as the figures quoted above

show, between 5 and 6 million have had to sell up in the EU during the last 2 decades. Without the subsidies this figure would have been many times greater. Since industrial capital is unable to integrate such numbers into wage labour, they would have swelled the ranks of the unemployed and required state support anyway. The bourgeoisie chose to support them on the land as it risked less social unrest.

## Results of Foot and Mouth

This crisis will accelerate the trends described above. Farms will merge, workers will be driven off the land and farming will become more capital intensive. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), in a report about to be published, predicts that 25% of all farms will have disappeared by 2005. This represents virtually all the small farms. The crisis has pushed many marginal farms into bankruptcy. In the future the

position of small farmers will get worse since agricultural subsidies and import restrictions are likely to be reduced in the next round of World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations. This will accelerate the process of ruin. In many of the European countries, e.g., France, the numbers of marginal farmers are much larger than they are in the UK and their ruin is likely to lead to social unrest on a scale much greater than we are witnessing today.

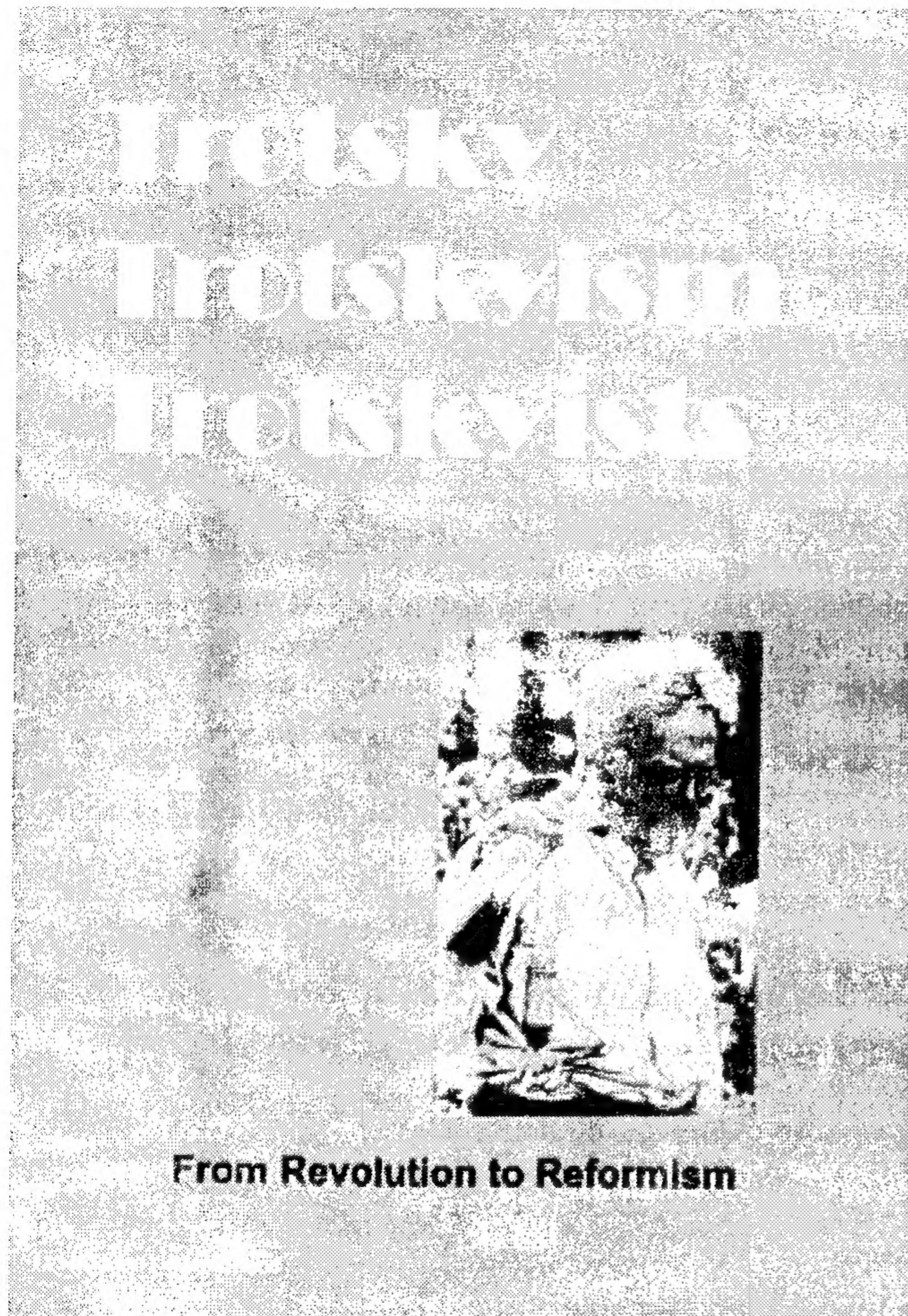
Agriculture's problems are intimately connected with those of capitalism. As long as capitalism needs to reduce labour costs it will try to cheapen food. It has consistently tried to do this since the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. The ghastly consequences of these attempts are visible, not only in the terrible epidemics in livestock, but also in the poisoning of lakes and rivers with fertilisers, sometimes killing all aquatic life, as for example in the Norfolk Broads, and the poisoning of groundwater with pesticides. All of these things have dire consequences for human beings. These problems all have their origin in the problems of the capitalist system of production itself and cannot be solved without the abolition of the capitalist mode of production.

CP

## Notes

1 *Land Essays*, Richard Mayse TLIO website

2 *Financial Times* 24/2/10 (British agriculture has actually been weakened because the subsidies are paid in Euros and the strength of the pound has caused the amount of the subsidies to fall.)



**Abstentionism is not apathy!**

# Capitalist Elections Change Nothing

This edition of *Revolutionary Perspectives* coincides with another capitalist electoral campaign in Britain. The elaborate myth that the winner of the election will run the country will be carefully nurtured in every news bulletin. In reality parliament is only a figleaf for the bourgeois state. We simply are asked to vote (or not) for the faction which the bourgeoisie would most like to have to front their rule. In our last issue and in our paper Aurora we have already stated our fundamental position that growing workers refusal to vote is to be encouraged. The ruling class are desperate to get us to participate to legitimise their rule. Indeed they are so worried about the increase in abstentionism that they have even made "citizenship" part of the National Curriculum in secondary schools. Here pupils are encouraged to "take part" in all kinds of community activity and have to learn about "the importance of voting". Labour ministers have denounced the growing "apathy and cynicism" of the voters. Opinion polls show that abstentionism could reach record highs (and it was over 50% in some working class constituencies in the last election). But what is there to vote for. The programmes of the parties are almost identical. In the past many workers were conned into voting for Labour knowing that they would not deliver anything different from the Tories. Today even that comforting illusion has been lost to the system.

But rushing to fill the gap are the various Trotskyist grouplets who have teamed up with some disgruntled Old Labour stalwarts to create the "Socialist Alliance". They are the new Seventh Cavalry of the system. Galloping over the horizon they claim in their title to be "socialist" but have not one "socialist" policy. We have yet to find any of their propaganda which mentions the words "working class" or "class struggle". Their most radical policy is to suggest the re-nationalisation of the railways – a step which

half-sane capitalists would approve of (only the post-Thatcherite Labour and Tory parties in Britain try to pretend it is rational) and which is not a step towards socialism. State ownership is state capitalism not socialism and it is only used when the capitalists want to restructure the economy. The Socialist Alliance is not even as radical as Old Labour was. [For a fuller analysis of the Socialist Alliance see "A Stale Act in the Same Old Capitalist Circus" in RP 20]

They might however serve a useful purpose. When they have failed to register more than a few per cent of the vote, (if they get 5% it would be a triumph for them) it will demonstrate what we have argued for years. Not only is standing for parliament not a way to socialism (it has to be created by millions of workers smashing the bourgeois state not electing some to join it) but it is also futile in the conditions of today's "totalitarian democracy". As long as the bourgeoisie control the material means of production they also control the means of persuasion. It is only when this is undermined by workers taking direct action that the way will open up for a new society. What we are saying is not new in the workers movement. It was forced on workers by their experience of betrayal by social democracy in the First World War. With a few honourable exceptions (Russia, Serbia, Bulgaria) their elected representatives in parliaments voted war credits for the imperialist slaughter. It was from this moment that Lenin decided that a new Third International would have to be created to replace the Second International which had gone over to the capitalist class.

## Abstentionism and the Communist Left

When the Third International was finally formed in 1919 no-one inside it believed that workers could

use parliament to achieve socialism. This was the fundamental lesson of the pre-war period and established the class difference between internationalists and social democrats. However the debate did not end there. At the Second Congress of the Communist (Third) International in 1920 the communist abstentionist fraction of the Socialist Party of Italy (in 1921, this fraction formed the Communist Party of Italy) presented their *Theses on Parliamentarism*. The *Theses*, were drawn up by Amadeo Bordiga who represented the minority position of the Italian Communist Left. For Bordiga the original motivation was to get rid of the corrupt parliamentary fraction of the Turati and Modigliani from the Party so that a communist party could be formed. In Italy the capitalist had entered the war late so that the Socialist Party did not split in a principled fashion as elsewhere in Europe. Nevertheless other left communists like the German KAPD, the Pankhurst group in Britain, etc. supported this minority view. In the Second Congress the majority supported the "revolutionary parliamentarianism", position of Lenin and Trotsky. The latter argued that, whilst parliament could be used as a "tribune", a platform to denounce capitalism, it could not be used to overthrow capitalism. Our modern-day "Leninists" would do well to remember this in their enthusiasm for elections. We originally published the *Theses on Abstentionism* in 1976 (in RP3, First Series). Naturally this has been out of print for some time so we welcome the International Communist Current's (ICC) reprint in *World Revolution* 243 (April 2001) since we believe that the *Theses* are even more relevant today than when they were first published.

## Bourgeois democracy and proletarian revolution

The *Theses* demonstrate the understanding achieved by the Communist Left at that time. In them, illusions in the magic of democracy are immediately dispelled:

*...the franchise granted to all citizens of all classes in the elections to the representative bodies of the state cannot prevent every government apparatus of the state from becoming the committee for the defence of the interests of the ruling capitalist class, and the state from organising itself as the historical organ of the struggle of the bourgeoisie against the proletarian revolution.* (Thesis 1).

Democracy at most only allows the non-ruling classes to chose the figure-head that the bourgeois state uses to deceive them, as a figure they have chosen is usually the best to deceive them — “at most”, because the bourgeoisie uses all its domination over what Marx called the intellectual means of production to manipulate their choice.

The *Theses* then go on to state the impossibility of working class political power coming through a majority of parliamentary seats. As implied by Thesis 1, real power does not lie with elected bodies. An example of this is the way in which the supposed most powerful elected politician in the US (and so, one might think, the most powerful man in the world), has scaled down his ideologically confrontational stance *vis-à-vis* China, pulled by the invisible strings tying him to the interests of US capital.

The alternative to working through parliament, is, for the working class, revolutionary struggle. And the victory of this struggle does not lead to the perfecting of democracy: On the contrary,

*... The conquest of power ... leads to the violent and careful abolition of the democratic organs and their replacement by organs of proletarian power — by workers' councils. The exploiting class is in this way robbed of all political*

*rights and the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e., a government system with class representation, is set up. The abolition of parliamentarism becomes a historical task of the communist movement. Even more, representative democracy is precisely the first form of bourgeois society that must be brought down, and moreover even before capitalist property.* (Thesis 2, our emphasis).

Instead of the rule of the bourgeoisie disguised as the rule of the “people”, the working class must openly rule in its own interest. As this interest demands the abolition of classes, in time the ex-bourgeoisie will be re-integrated into society to the extent that their economic domination is eroded. To the extent that their economic domination is *not* eroded, they will pose a threat to the introduction of a classless society, and must be *politically neutralised*.

The third *Thesis* makes the point that local government institutions share the capitalist class character of the central state.

## The historical dimension of the question

Like all Marxist analyses, the *Thesis* consider their subject in its historical context.

In the years following the First World War, the tasks of revolutionaries included the need to free the proletariat from the legacy of the old Social Democratic parties which had betrayed the workers' cause by supporting their local imperialists in that war:

*...In those countries which have been ruled for a longer time by a democratic order which is rooted in the habits and thoughts of the masses, and also in the old socialist parties, this task [of freeing the proletariat from the damaging influence of Social Democratic prejudices] is of special importance, and assumes the first place among the problems of the preparation of the revolution.* (Thesis 4).

According to the fifth *Thesis*, while the prospect of a proletarian revolution was still distant, participation in the democratic process could still allow

opportunities for propagandising the communist vision of a transformation of society. However, for the *Theses*, there was still a distinction to be made between various countries:

*...in those countries where a bourgeoisie has as yet only started and is creating new institutions, the entry of communists into the representative bodies, which are still in a formative stage, can have a big influence on the development of events in order to bring about a favourable outcome of the revolution and the final victory of the proletariat.* (Thesis 5).

This is a clear reference to the situation in Russia, where the Bolsheviks had worked in the Duma and the constituent assembly so long as this participation had pushed forward the possibility of a proletarian seizure of power. But, in the context of a capitalism that faced a world in which the proletarian revolution was not only no longer distant but had already happened in Russia,

*...in the countries where the democratic order was introduced a long time ago, there is no possibility of exploiting parliamentarianism for the revolutionary cause of communism. Clarity of propaganda no less than preparation for the final struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat demand that communists carry out propaganda for a boycott of the elections on the part of the working class.* (Thesis 6).

As a motivation for this boycott, we can do no better than quote *Thesis 7* in full:

*Under these historical conditions, under which the revolutionary conquest of power by the proletariat has become the main problem of the movement, every political activity of the Party must be dedicated to this goal. It is necessary to break with the bourgeois lie once and for all, with the lie that tries to make people believe that every clash of the hostile parties, every struggle for the conquest of power, must be played out in the framework of the democratic mechanism, in election campaigns and parliamentary*

*debates. It will not be possible to achieve this goal without renouncing completely the traditional method of calling on workers to participate in the elections, where they work side by side with the bourgeois class, without putting an end to the spectacle of the proletariat appearing on the same parliamentary ground as its exploiters.*

## Meaningful action, not apathy

The eighth *Thesis* makes the point that Social Democracy tries to reduce politics to electoral politics, while syndicalist and anarchist tendencies were successively using popular mistrust of the democracy to reject political action, and Marxists were missing the opportunity to propagandise for the revolutionary seizure of power by not clearly separating themselves from bourgeois democracy.

The involvement of communists in electoral action absorbs all the party's activity, and gives the impression that "this really is the main action for the achievement of communist goals" (*Thesis 9*), despite theoretical assertions to the contrary. Moreover,

*... it leads to an almost complete renunciation of any work of revolutionary organisation and preparation by giving the party organisation a technical character that stands in complete contradiction to the requirements of legal and illegal revolutionary work. (Thesis 9).*

Rejection of electoral work would also help to rid the Communist International of those Social Democratic reformists which had been carried into the International inside parties which had joined on a majority vote. *Thesis 10* made it clear that, without the removal of these elements, "the Communist International will not be able to carry out its historic role".

Finally, *Thesis 11* points out that, in parliament, the debates are constrained to remain within boundaries which are acceptable to the institution itself, and are thus useless for the revolutionary cause. Success in parliamentary con-

flicts can only be achieved by using "the principles on which the institution bases itself and by using nuances in the rules, just as success in the election campaign will be judged more and more according to the number of votes and seats obtained" (*Thesis 11*). *Thesis 11* concludes

*Every attempt by the Communist Parties to lend the practice of parliamentarism a totally different character will simply lead to a bankruptcy of the energies that will have to be sacrificed to this labour of Sisyphus. The cause of the communist revolution calls summarily for direct action against the capitalist system of the exploiters.*

## The Theses Today

Ironically the communist abstention list fraction ultimately withdrew their insistence in the question of abstentionism. *Thesis 10*, which talks about abstentionism as such dividing the Communist International from social democracy, is mistaken. This dividing line was in the wrong place. As well as dividing communism from social democracy, it also divided communists from communists! When the Communist Party of Italy was formed it included genuine communists who still wanted to use parliament as a tribune (and many were in fact elected and remained in parliament until it was dissolved in the fascist dictatorship in 1926). Unlike the KAPD and the communist Left in Britain the Italian communist left recognised that abstentionism is a question of tactics. This is why they did eventually form a Communist Party in Italy which opposed the decline of the Comintern. This task was abandoned by the other left communist organisations and this weakened the impact of the Communist Left. Whilst the Italian Communists fought a long and losing battle against the decline of the Comintern it did give them the programmatic coherence to revive their organisation in the post Second World War. By contrast the abstentionists on principles dissolved into more and more divided sects from which little coherent legacy is left today.

In some ways, though, the *Theses on Parliamentarism* were ahead of their

time (the Italian working class had only had the vote since 1913). Today it is a tactic which is overwhelmingly so correct that it is difficult, if not impossible to see when it could ever be abandoned.

"Revolutionary parliamentarism", if it is by no means a "class line", is today the last resort of opportunists and hypocrites.

On a final historical note the abstentionism of the *Theses* is based on the proximity of proletarian revolution and on the length of time the democratic order had existed in a country. What is the significance of the *Theses* today, when the revolution appears as distant as ever? And does the specificity of the argument to particular countries persist?

To answer the second question first, we would say that this particular specificity belongs to the past. In the early years of the last century, the possibility of the bourgeoisie coming to power in a particular country had almost vanished, but awareness of this reality had not yet been achieved. It was vanishing because the bourgeoisie was almost everywhere, formally or not, already the ruling class. When a real class revolution accompanies a revolution in political forms, it is possible that the "entry of communists into the representative bodies, ... , can have a big influence on the development of events in order to bring about ... the final victory of the proletariat", but, today, where the bourgeoisie is in power everywhere, political revolutions are motivated, at least in part, by the need to maintain bourgeois political domination over the proletariat, and any "constituent assembly" is part of that fraud. It is necessary that revolutionaries do their utmost to prevent working class action from being channelled into that fraud.

The same reason, the fact that democracy is the bourgeoisie's first line of defence against the working class's coming to consciousness, motivates the abstentionism of communists today. To rebuild a revolutionary consciousness among the working class, it is necessary that this class rejects the idea that the bourgeoisie will allow its rule to be challenged through legal channels. On the contrary, these channels represent a diversion of the

## Comment:

# Racism – A Weapon Against the Working Class

No sooner had the mainstream party leaders publicly signed up not to “exploit the race issue” in the forthcoming election than race appeared at the top of the political agenda. Predictably enough a little Englander Tory has “spoken up” against the idea of a ‘multicultural Britain’ and opened up a whole can of racist worms in the Conservative Party. These are being seized on by the press as further ‘proof’ that William Hague is not a ‘firm’ leader, all part of the discrediting of the Tories by a ruling establishment that wants to see Blair and Labour back in office.

Aside from the discrediting of the Conservatives though, there is another game afoot relating to the issue itself. Nowadays it’s okay to acknowledge that we live in a capitalist world. But it is in the interests of the powers that be to keep the question of class division (and its overcoming) well off the political agenda. In this world of carefully orchestrated brainwashing by the media the reality of class divided society which is fundamental to capitalism is being very deliberately set aside. Apparently Tony Blair only has to announce that the class struggle is over for it to be true. Today, it would appear, there is no longer any clash of interests between those who depend

on a wage [or state handouts] in order to live and those who live very well off their investment capital, company profits, share bonuses and the like. We’re all supposed to be in the same boat, with our ‘stakeholder’ pensions based on stock market performances, our mortgages which have seemingly turned the majority of the working class into property owners, and our spending power which shows that our real social weight is as consumers.

Against this fairy-tale world of a capitalism without a working class there is the harsh reality of most people’s lives. The endemic unemployment, despite the endless massaging of figures, training schemes and working family credits to coerce people into appallingly low paid work; the longer and harder working hours (Britain’s workers work the longest in the EU) for miserable pay or the doubling up of part-time jobs to try and get together a family wage; the ever-diminishing health and welfare services; collapsing transport and urban infrastructures; dilapidated, under-staffed and under-funded schools... if anyone thinks for a minute that this situation shows that capitalist society is a disaster, well forget it. The media and politicians will see to it that the issues are packaged and pre-

sented with quick fix ‘solutions’ that provide a scapegoat for the real culprit which is capitalism itself. The declining health service is reduced to a matter of hospital waiting lists which are duly monitored while spending cuts continue; the fact that few pupils from understaffed and under-resourced schools in the most destitute working class areas pass exams is reduced to a question ‘poorly performing’ teachers. The crumbling of a whole society is being disguised by platitudes about the breakdown of law and order, jargon about accountability which puts the onus on overworked individual workers to keep the system running. Above all, there are the carefully orchestrated diversions which lay the blame anywhere except on the capitalist system.

## Playing the Race Card

So with race and so-called national identity. Racism, ethnic differences and inter-communal discord are all notoriously easy for governments and the ruling class in general to exploit as a means of dividing and ruling, of heading off a unified struggle of the exploited and diverting attention from the economic crisis. Faced with massive workers’ strikes and demonstrations in the ‘80’s, Yugoslavia’s rulers preferred to play the racism and nationalism cards — with all the horrific consequences that have since ensued. All over the world, from Algeria to Indonesia to Zimbabwe, crisis-ridden governments and states are cynically encouraging the scapegoating of racial and ethnic groups in order to hold on to power. Of course, any comparison of the fair and decent British state’s handling of racism with the brutal ‘ethnic cleansing’ of the Balkans or barbaric ex-colonies

## Capitalist Elections

Continued from previous page

class away from activity for its own interest. Only by the class learning to organise *against*, rather than through, the bourgeois state, can a revolutionary situation once again arise.

If this revolutionary situation seems a long way off, it is nevertheless necessary to prepare for it. When it

appears, the class must be in a position to make use of it — it needs to be equipped with a party ready to propagandise for the struggle for a proletarian dictatorship and to take the organisational lead in that struggle for workers’ councils. The IBRP is devoted to the creation of that party.

EDL

like Zimbabwe or Indonesia will be vehemently denied.

The capitalist class here is not so desperate as to be seeking pogroms. However, as we have said, it does not want to see a revival of class struggle. It is consequently ready to have workers' minds focused on just about anything besides a collective struggle on their own account: sex, soaps, football, the national lottery, foot and mouth... and, despite the election pact, race. The recent attack on a pensioner in Oldham by youths of Asian origin was quickly hailed as a "racial assault" in the press. "Get out of our area!" was blazoned across local papers. In fact the pensioner himself ("war hero" in the tabloid press) denied that there was a racial motive. He said it was a straightforward criminal mugging in an area of high youth unemployment and deprivation. It was the local police who made up the quotes about "get out of our area" in order to justify their own racist policing of the area for years.

And what is the net effect of interminable reports about a mounting backlog of 'asylum seekers' and floods of 'illegal immigrants' pouring into the country? Why does the media publicise so keenly any remark a politician might make on race? Why don't strikes get the same sort of media attention as racist assaults? It would be naïve to suggest that without media propaganda there would be no racism inside the working class or to deny that the social barbarism brought by the economic crisis has not also fuelled racism. The point is that the issue is one which it suits the bourgeoisie to dwell on: not just because it diverts workers from identifying capitalism as the problem but because it has the potential to divide worker against worker. So, while the likes of the *Sun* and the *Express* treat their readers to fabricated horror stories of immigrants jumping housing and benefit queues or whatever (when the real horror is for the asylum seekers sent to unfit housing in remote areas where the National Front is strongest), the 'serious' press are promoting 'multiculturalism'. This schizophrenia is not accidental. The reactionary Tory press might demand action to prevent the British becoming a mongrel race (ignoring the uncom-

fortable historical fact that the biggest mongrel invasion of these islands was by Germanic tribes of Angles and Saxons) but the boss class as a whole are quite happy to have illegal immigrants in the workforce. After all illegal workers have no rights. On building sites around London or in potato fields in Lincolnshire workers from Eastern Europe earn a pittance compared with those who have legal rights. But the fact that they are prepared to work for such a pittance also reduces the overall wage levels in Britain. This is just one more material root of racism but it also has the bosses laughing all the way to the bank. No wonder then that the mainstream of the bourgeoisie hypocritically condemn Tory right-wingers in the name of "multicultural Britain".

### Multiculturalism – Divide and Rule

This is a convenient concept which, under the guise of 'respect for other people's way of life', emphasises the permanence of the differences which could just as easily be applied to the concept of the ghetto. The British State took it up in a big way after the riots of unemployed youth in Southall, Brixton, Toxteth, Bristol and other British cities at the beginning of the '80's. These were all labelled 'race riots' by the state and, on the advice of the Scarman report, funds were allocated to local authorities to dish out to 'ethnic minority' community representatives charged with keeping their youth off the streets. Since then the multicultural Britain funding lobby has taken off in a big way (and plenty of little careers depend on it). With devolution we have now seen the official revival of the Welsh language, the placating of Orangemen bigotry with messages on the right to retain their culture... there seems no end to the diverse cultural identities workers are being encouraged to assume rather than recognise the interests they share as a class. Racism in any form is anathema to communists but racism disguised as its opposite and used as a

deliberate ploy to get workers to put a spurious national identity before their own class interests is all the more abhorrent.

The world's working class is nothing other than a class of migrant workers – the dispossessed of history who have had, and still have, no alternative but to find a means and whereabouts to sell their labour power. While the politicians debate whether and how much migrant workers have contributed to the 'British way of life', workers themselves might consider what the British way of life, or rather the British capitalist crisis, is doing for them. A serious pause for thought will only confirm what *The Communist Manifesto* declared long ago: "Workers have no country". Our cultural inheritance is a worldwide one, the sense of solidarity, the collective recognition of our power to revolutionise the world, which once made the ruling classes tremble. This is what our rulers are trying to kill forever with their talk of race and cultural identity.

E. Rayner

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## The Middle East

# Still Imperialism's Battleground

The Middle East is again in a state of acute crisis, a crisis which reflects the contradictions and the problems of US imperialism in the region. Since the Second World War this area has lurched from one crisis to the next. Though the national leaders have strutted the political stage making their speeches, launching wars or making peace and holding innumerable summit meetings, the real actors have always been the imperialist powers. These powers through their economic and military strength are able to control and manipulate their clients and the local politicians who represent them.

The reason for the succession of crises, which have engulfed this region, is that the area is one of vital interest to global capitalism and therefore an area of intense imperialist rivalry. It happens to be the largest oil producer and to have the largest deposits of oil in the world. Since the Second World War, oil has been the principal source of energy for capitalism and remains so today. It forms vital part of the life-blood of the system, and it is therefore no accident that this region has become the theatre for imperialist conflicts. These conflicts will not be ended until either oil becomes unimportant for capitalism or the capitalist system of production is destroyed. We have written at length on the vital importance of the control of oil supplies and its transport routes in the pages of previous editions of our press and will not repeat the arguments here. We refer readers to *Revolutionary Perspectives* 17 "Oil and the new US economy", and *Internationalist Communist* 18 "Control of the oil market in the epoch where finance dominates". Here we simply restate the area's importance for imperialism and illustrate the massive effort, which the imperialist powers have put into controlling this area and establishing client states with the following facts. Since 1950 the US has provided Israel, its principal client, with over \$46bn in direct military grants and similar amounts were

previously committed by the USSR to Egypt, Syria and Iraq. Today the US supplies Israel with \$1.92bn military aid together with \$960m economic aid annually. The US's second most important client, Egypt, a country which changed from being a Russian client to a US one in the '70's and signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979, receives \$1.3bn in military aid and \$735m in economic aid annually. Jordan, another US client, who like Egypt has signed a peace treaty with Israel, receives \$225m. The US uses its other clients in the region, notably Saudi Arabia and Kuwait as bases to station its own troops. The US now has 21 000 troops permanently stationed in its bases in the gulf, together with 30 naval ships and 170 aircraft. In addition, it has stockpiled sufficient military equipment in its bases to enable it to be able to fit out an army in a matter of weeks.

## Imperialist power balance

The context of the present crisis is, however, different from those of the past as the balance of imperialist forces has shifted. Since the collapse of the USSR in 1991 the US has been the only superpower and was thus able to dictate the course of events. US dominance was confirmed by the Gulf War and the following years saw it attempt to impose an American peace (*Pax Americana*). Initially it appeared as if this attempt might work. The Palestinians, who had lost their Russian backers, were forced to turn to the US and under the 1993 Oslo accords abandoned their aim of regaining the entire territory of Palestine, recognised the state of Israel and agreed to accept a future undefined mini-state. Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994 and discussions were started with Syria over the return of the Golan Heights.

The key weakness of the *Pax Americana* was of course the settlement in Palestine, which had been fudged from the start. The state of Israel was created by the imperialist manoeuvres of the victors of World War 2, the US and Russia. This was part of a larger plan to eject the older and weaker imperialist powers, France and Britain, from the Middle East. Creating a state in a land where others were living meant terrorising them off the land. The land of the present state of Israel is only in Israeli hands because Israeli settlers took it from Palestinians and expelled them by force. The Israelis were not therefore prepared to allow the return of refugees but, on the contrary, wanted to further settle and annex the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza, thus inevitably creating more refugees. The Palestinians demanded the right for refugees to return and the return of the territories occupied in 1967. For the Israeli ruling class the Oslo accords were a smoke screen behind which colonisation and annexation of the occupied territories could proceed. For the Palestinian rulers the ridiculous mini-state of the Oslo accords was a position from which they could not retreat. The US tried to reconcile these positions but the breakdown of the Camp David summit in the last weeks of the Clinton presidency indicated it was simply impossible. The present low-level war or *Intifada* is the logical outcome of these contradictory positions. It is a recognition that force has to be used to produce a new situation. For the present, *Pax Americana* has reached an impasse, and this has been recognised by the new US administration in its adoption of a form of crisis management.

## Shockwaves of the Palestine crisis

The present low level war in Palestine is sending shock waves throughout the region and upsetting US interests elsewhere. It is particu-

larly embarrassing for US client states since it gives room for the local political opponents. Arab nationalists and Islamicists are able to use the savage attacks on Palestinians by the Israelis to call for a break with the US. Throughout the Middle East there is a mass of wretched and downtrodden people, 3.6 million Palestinian refugees, 14 million unemployed, millions only partly employed and desperate peasantry, who will rally to such causes, which they see as a way of expressing their discontent.

Such mobilisations cannot be ignored by the national political leaders who are generally forced to make concessions to the popular anger they express by reaffirming their commitment to the Arab nation, the liberation of Palestine and Islam. There is therefore a tendency to Arab unity. An example of this is the recent rapprochement between the PLO and Syria and that of Syria and Egypt with Iraq.

### US plays the Iraq card again

For its part the US cannot ignore these popular movements either. The first act of the Bush administration was to bomb Baghdad. This was a crude attempt to refocus Arab attention on Iraq and to re-emphasise Arab divisions. This was, however, a clumsy move, which backfired in a number of ways. Firstly it gave Iraq an opening to present itself as the steadfast supporter of the Palestinians and common victim of US/Israeli aggression, and secondly it encouraged reconciliation of Arab regimes with Iraq and the erosion of the UN sanctions. The raid, which was of course illegal under bourgeois law, was branded as such by the Arab league and even the US's strongest gulf ally, Saudi Arabia, condemned it. The effect of the raid was thus the opposite of what was intended and caused the falling away of the last Arab members of the Gulf War coalition loyal to the US.

The US attempts to re-emphasise Arab divisions have not, however, been entirely futile since these divisions do exist. It has succeeded, during the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Gulf War, in presenting itself as the guaran-

tor of peace in the Gulf. It has also signed a further 10-year pact with Kuwait allowing it to keep its forces and bases in the country, for which the Kuwait state foots the bill. Also, at the Arab summit in Amman in March, the divisions over Iraq were unbridgeable and prevented a strong condemnation of US support for Israel, though a statement calling for the lifting of sanctions on Iraq was adopted.

### US defence of Israel

In the longer term it has been quite impossible for the US to disguise its problems in Palestine and its support for Israel. In March, it was forced to veto a UN resolution on sending a UN protection force to the occupied territories to protect Palestinians from the Israeli killings. This veto has compromised the US in Arab eyes and has been interpreted as giving the green light for Israel to continue its atrocities. This is not, of course, entirely correct and the US has ensured that the Israelis do not overstep certain limits. The US is a guarantor of the Oslo accords and is not prepared to see Israel tear them up at this stage. In April, for example, when Israeli tanks re-occupied parts of Gaza, handed back under the Oslo accords, and announced their intention to stay for as long as they liked, the US insisted on an immediate withdrawal. This is an indication that the US will not tolerate an Israeli annexation of these territories and has not entirely given up on a return to the Oslo accords in some form. Israeli annexation might be able to take place in the context of a wider war, such as that of 1967, but a wider war in the Middle East is not in the US interests at present. This is because there are now no serious imperialist rivals to remove from the area and a war would give the US rivals the opportunity to undermine the US position. It for this reason that the US warned Israel not to escalate the situation after it attacked a Syrian radar station in Lebanon in April.

### Challenges to US domination

The US is, however, facing challenges from its rivals. It is signifi-

cant that the Palestinian leadership is trying to draw the European Union (EU) into its negotiations with Israel. The latest meeting between Palestinian Authority (PA) officials and the Israeli foreign minister Peres, which took place in Athens in early April, were arranged by the EU. The EU is aiding the PA and European capital is actually going into the occupied territories. Larger quantities of EU aid are going into the Arab countries surrounding Israel. The EU has recently called on Israel to release the Palestinian Authority's taxes, which it is withholding, and has threatened to suspend Israel's preferential trade association with the EU and to suspend scientific and technological cooperation. The EU also wishes to end the embargo on Iraq and get its hands on Iraqi oil and it is significant that after the US raid on Baghdad France demanded an explanation.

Challenges to US imperialism are also shown by developments in Iran. The Clinton administration tried to open up direct talks with the Iranian leadership, but nothing came of this, and the Bush team has renewed the US trade embargo. The EU, Japan, China and Russia are all busily investing in Iranian oil exploitation. Japan, for example, has just signed a \$3bn deal to exploit the Azedegan field, and part of this deal is that Iran is to provide Japan with crude oil for 11 years! Iran itself has just signed a security agreement with Saudi Arabia and is considering supplying both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait with water via pipelines across the Gulf. It is clear that the US policy of isolation of Iran is being seriously undermined. Iran is also rebuilding its armed forces and, according to the US, is spending \$7bn over the next 5 years doing this. Russia has signaled her re-entry into the Middle East by abrogating a 1995 Russian/US agreement, which prevented it supplying arms to Iran. Putin announced in March that Russia would supply missiles and other weapons to Tehran and would resume work on a Russian supplied nuclear power station at Bushehr on the Gulf. Russia and Iran have a common interest not only in undermining US interests in the Middle East but also in the Caucasus to the north, which is also a major oil supplying area and another battle-

ground for imperialism. The Russian moves have drawn sharp protests from the US.

The present crisis is providing opportunities for other powers in the region and is therefore dangerous for the US. It is clear US imperialism's policy is undergoing a crisis and is in need of revision. The recommendations of a draft report of the energy task force, chaired by the vice president Cheney, who is the real force behind US foreign policy, which proposes the lifting of sanctions against Iran, Iraq and Libya indicates that such a revision is being studied. The principal areas in which the US dominance is being challenged are Palestine and Iraq, and developments in these areas will be considered in more detail below.

### ***Intifada: last card of the Palestinian bourgeoisie***

Since the Oslo agreement of 1993, Arafat has always argued that he represented the moderate wing of Palestinian nationalism. If the Israelis could not accommodate his moderate demands, he argued, he would be swept away, and the whirlwind of radical nationalism, whose representatives he had imprisoned, would engulf the occupied territories. In effect this was the last card which Arafat could play and he played it in October 2000. Of course, Arafat has no intention of being swept away by his political opponents and has done his best to retain control of the situation. Although the imprisoned leaders of Hamas, Islamic Jihad etc. have been released, the principal agents of the fighting appear to be Arafat's own forces such as Tanzim and Force 17. The previous *Intifada*, which lasted from '87 to '93, led to the Oslo peace accords, and there can be little doubt that he hopes the present *Intifada* will lead to new peace agreement — presumably an improvement on the terms rejected at Camp David.

As we pointed out in RP20<sup>1</sup> radical nationalism is an expression of the Palestinian petty bourgeoisie of the occupied territories, but it has the ability to attract broad layers of the Palestinian masses into its ranks. This is because of the desperate material

conditions of the Palestinian workers whose conditions are now worse than at any time since 1967. Unemployment is now 50%, and with the territories under siege large sections of the Palestinian masses are literally the "wretched of the earth," and form a rich recruiting ground for the radical bourgeois movements.

The actual violence and protests have been directed principally at the Israeli army in occupied or divided areas and at the settlements and settlers. This violence appears to be largely controlled by the PA's forces. The attacks within Israel itself are conducted by the radical nationalist groups such as Hamas, whose aim is to regain the whole of Palestine, not just the occupied territories.

### **Israeli intentions**

As has been mentioned above the Sharon government aims to settle and annex the occupied territories and this will entail a fresh expulsion of many Palestinians. Sharon has withdrawn all offers made by the previous government and announced that Israel will not evacuate a single settlement. "The settlements," he declared in an interview with *Ha'aretz* newspaper in April, "guard the birthplace of the Jews and grant us strategic depth to protect our existence." There are now 7000 settlers in Gaza, 200 000 in the West Bank and a further 180 000 in occupied East Jerusalem, and the settlement building continues. After becoming prime minister Sharon announced plans for a further 7000 Israeli homes in occupied East Jerusalem. Sharon is also on record as having stated that "Jordan is Palestine," which can only mean that he considers Palestinians should be living in Jordan. The Israeli state is well-practised in clearing Palestinians off their land. It has perfected the methods pioneered by the colonial powers such as open violence, appropriation of common land, punitive taxation and legislation to do this. Before the creation of the state of Israel, the Zionists owned 6.6% of the land, which was to become Israel. After the war in 1948 they owned 78%. Before the war of 1967 they owned no land in Gaza or the West Bank, now 83% of the West bank and 40% of Gaza and a large part of

East Jerusalem are in their hands. There are also material reasons why Israel needs to keep these lands the most important of which is that 50% of the country's water now comes from areas outside the 1967 boundaries. The consistent colonising of the occupied territories, which has been carried out by all Israeli governments, indicates the true intentions of the Israeli bourgeoisie.

### **Israeli repression**

For the Israeli bourgeoisie force is an essential part of its method of imposing its plans on the Palestinians. The savage repression of the Israeli army is daily reported in the bourgeois press. Since the start of the *Intifada* almost 500 people have been killed, all but 43 of these were Palestinians and the majority of these were children. The Israelis have not hesitated to use artillery and tanks, helicopter gunships and poison gas (Sarin)<sup>2</sup> against the Palestinians. In addition the usual Israeli methods of assassinations, kidnappings, demolition of houses and collective punishments have been systematically carried out. Palestinian resistance has been met with brutal reprisals. The scraps of land, which have been given back to the, have been divided up and placed under siege. Workers are prevented from going to work in Israel or even from crossing from one Palestinian patch to another. Supplies are prevented from coming in and similarly exports are stopped. This has led to an additional 300 000 unemployed since the *Intifada* began. All this is to put pressure on the PA to force it to capitulate.

The Israeli bourgeoisie holds the PA responsible for the *Intifada* and is trying to engineer its collapse. The siege prevents it exercising authority over the scraps of land it nominally controls and at the same time reduces its local income as the economy grinds to a halt. In addition the Israelis are withholding approximately \$500 million of taxes which they collect in Israel on behalf of the PA. The PA has approximately 100 000 employees and is unable to pay them. It is at present kept functioning by grants from the Arab states, which are supplying \$40m per month. The Amman summit of the Arab

League pledged \$1bn for the support of the PA.

While the Israeli government is correct in seeing the PA as orchestrating the *Intifada*, if the PA were destroyed the radical wing of Palestinian nationalism would probably gain control and they themselves would have implemented Arafat's threat. This would lead to areas being controlled by local warlords and a much higher level of violence. This would give Israel the opportunity to reoccupy the areas at present under PA control and to expel the resistance. At present the US does not appear to be prepared to accept this and US ambassador to Israel, Indyke, warned the Israeli government against causing the collapse of the PA and "Risking an even bigger explosion"<sup>3</sup>.

While the *Intifada* is damaging Israel, its affect on the Palestinians is much more severe and it cannot be sustained in the long term. Nor can the *Intifada* be converted into a slow war of attrition, such as defeated the Israelis in Lebanon. Israel with its crushing military superiority, is unlikely to make the concessions needed to bring about a fresh round of negotiations unless compelled to do so by the US, on the contrary, the Israelis would dearly like to resolve the issue by force. While a resolution by Israeli military force cannot be excluded it is unlikely because it would jeopardise the position of US imperialism throughout the area. The Palestinians, on the other hand, will find it hard to accept worse terms than they rejected at Camp David in January. At the time of writing, Egypt and Jordan, the US front-line clients, have put forward a plan for ending the violence and having talks about talks and this is being pursued. It appears likely that the talks will lead to some vague agenda and creeping settlement and annexation of the occupied territories will continue. This will represent another long-term defeat for Palestinian nationalism. Such a defeat is, however, likely to give the US rivals the opportunity to take an increasingly strong stand against Israel and so support their position in the Arab countries where oil and the major opportunities for trade and investment opportunities exist.

## Only way forward for workers

What we are witnessing in Palestine is a clash of bourgeois interests. A battle for land, for water and for the right to exploit the Palestinian working class is being fought out under the ideology of nationalism within a wider framework of global imperialist struggle. The working class as a political force is absent from all this. On both sides workers are being used as cannon fodder and their blood is being spilt for causes which cannot possibly benefit them. Although the Palestinian workers are more downtrodden than their Israeli class brothers, this is simply part of the deception, which the bourgeoisie uses the world over to divide workers against each other and get them to fight for bourgeois causes. Exactly the same divisions were used in apartheid South Africa to mobilise white workers behind the cause of Afrikaner nationalism and black workers behind African nationalism. The disastrous consequences of workers accepting these divisions can be seen today.<sup>4</sup> Palestinian workers receive approximately one third of the wages of their Israeli counterparts, no healthcare, no insurance, etc. These are the powerful divisions, which are used to get workers to fight each other. The Israeli bourgeoisie delights in exploiting the Palestinian workers at starvation wages and wants this to continue for as long as possible. In fact all workers of the region have a common interest in standing together and opposing their common exploitation by capitalism whatever its nationality. For workers to kill each other for bourgeois nationalism can only postpone the day when they do stand together as a class, and this can only benefit the bourgeoisie.

As we wrote in RP20 the only way forward for the workers of Palestine is

*To start to pose the idea of class against class.*

For this to occur it is necessary for the communist

programme to raise its head once more in Palestine. It is necessary to bring about the unity of the Palestinian and Israeli workers against the Israeli bosses and the Palestinian junior partners. This can only happen if there is a coherent organisation fighting for it. The birth of a nucleus of a proletarian political party in the area is an urgent task. The IBRP exists to assist in the creation of such a nucleus and we call on those who are in political agreement with the political perspectives expressed above to contact the IBRP and start the difficult work of forming a real proletarian political party in this region.

## Notes

1 RP20 "Palestinian Workers Die for Bourgeois Nationalism"

2 *Arab Times* 26/02/01. (All Israel's chemicals for riot control are supplied by the US)

3 *Arab Times* 3/3/01

4 See RP14 "National Liberation in Africa" and "South Africa — Bourgeois Democracy at Last."

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# Iraq – The Horrific Price of Imperialism

It is now over 20 years since the start of the Iran/Iraq war and 10 years since the Gulf War. In this period Iraq has suffered over a million deaths in war and over 3 million crippled, a further 2 million have died through malnutrition or lack of medicine caused by the UN sanctions. The country has been economically devastated and masses of its population have been forced abroad. Events on this scale don't happen because one madman gets control of a government, rather they express the violent nature of the system under which we live, and the savagery of its imperialist drive. Politicians like Saddam Hussein are pawns of imperialism and if it wasn't Saddam it would be someone else. Although Saddam has changed his master from time to time, he has always been a tool of imperialism. Contrary to what we are told he has been most useful to the US in the past and remains so today.

The Iran/Iraq war, which lasted for 8 years and caused death on the scale of the First World War, was instigated by US imperialism. Saddam, who in 1980 was the trusted ally of the US, was told to attack Iran and that he could take the Shatt Al Arab waterway and the oilfields of Khuzestan. This was a strategy to weaken Iran and restore US influence over it, which had been lost in the 1979 overthrow of the Shah's regime. Ten years later when the US wished to weaken Iraq and station its own forces in the gulf it encouraged him to invade Kuwait. This war gave them the opportunity to directly station their forces in the area.

## US strategy in the Gulf

US imperialism is now directly militarily involved in the affairs of the Gulf. Before the Gulf War the US relied on its clients to do its dirty work but this has now changed. Instead of relying on Iran, and later Iraq, to fight

its wars, the US now has its own forces permanently stationed in the area, and it is using them continuously. Every day the US airforce bombs Iraq and its navy patrols the Gulf to arrest unauthorised Iraqi oil exports.

After the Gulf War, the US policy for the area was to weaken Iraq and isolate both of its previous clients, Iran and Iraq. Iraq was to be weakened by dividing it into 3 zones, with the US controlling the airspace in the north-



ern and southern zones, it was to be disarmed and sanctions were to be applied. The US policy was to keep Iraq weak but to retain the Saddam regime so that the presence of US forces in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia could be justified. Contrary to what the US says it is quite happy with the Saddam regime and this is the reason its efforts to remove it have been so feeble. Nor does the US want a complete collapse of Iraqi central authority, which could lead to the break up of Iraq with the likely outcome of Turkey seizing the Kurdish north and Iran seizing the Shiite south. This would lead to massive instability

in the whole region. They want Iraq weak but still a potential threat, like a beaten dog which still snarls. The sanctions have been an essential part of this policy.

## Crumbling sanctions

Saddam is now trying to sell himself and, of course, Iraq to the US's rivals in the Area. He has resumed co-operation with Russia over oil extraction, and is making overtures to the EU suggesting fat contracts could be in store, and has made gestures such as demanding that he is paid for all oil sold under the UN regime in Euros. All this can only be a prelude to more devastation of Iraq by imperialism as the struggle develops. These manoeuvres have, however, started to weaken the stranglehold in which US imperialism holds the country.

The UN sanctions have indeed kept Iraq weak and at a terrible price, but in the last year they have started to crumble. There can be little doubt that the Palestinian *Intifada* and the brutal Israeli response have contributed greatly to this crumbling. US clients are breaking ranks on these sanctions. All the Arab regimes bordering Israel, who fear Israeli attack, have now restored relations with Iraq and are helping her to avoid sanctions. The Arab League conference in Amman in March issued a call for the lifting of sanctions. The US's imperialist rivals, the EU, Russia and China also favour the ending of sanctions for their own imperialist reasons. The Gulf War coalition has now completely collapsed with only Britain reluctantly supporting the US. It is clear that sanctions will collapse unless they are altered or withdrawn.

The extent to which the sanctions are crumbling can be seen from the following statistics. Last year Iraq earned \$1bn from oil sales outside the

UN control. She also earned \$2bn from discounting UN sold oil to the big oil companies in return for secret payments outside UN control. Trade between Iraq and Arab countries has increased enormously and was \$6.2bn in 2000. Syria has reopened its oil pipeline to Iraq and is receiving 100 000 barrels per day, and oil is being exported by road to Jordan, Turkey and Iran. Iraq is rebuilding its oil terminal at Khor al Amaya in the Gulf, which the US destroyed in the Gulf War, in order to export oil in greater volumes. Egypt and Syria have established a free trade zone with Iraq which came into force in April and which will deal a further blow to the sanctions. Other states have indicated their intention to break the embargo. Turkey, for example aims to boost its trade to \$2.5bn annually, which represents pre-Gulf War levels. The air embargo on Iraq has disintegrated with many flights being made without UN authorisation, and Syria has established a regular service to Baghdad.

### Iraq and the Palestinians

Iraq has used the Palestinian crisis to present itself as the defender of their struggle and common victim of US and Israeli aggression. The Saddam regime has pledged 1 billion Euros, to support the *Intifada* despite its own difficulties. (For Saddam, Euros are the currency of oil.) It also attempted to send a food convoy to the occupied territories though the Israelis would not allow this. These gestures have found an echo in the radical Palestinian nationalism and Saddam's portrait is often carried on their demonstrations. This occurs not only in the occupied territories but also in Jordan.

### Smart sanctions

The US is attempting a modification of the present sanctions regime and has floated some new ideas about what it calls smart sanctions. From what has been suggested these appear to be a tightening of the present sanctions rather than a relaxation. They involve more US/UN control of oil sales, US/UN control of land border crossing points, inspection of all air-

craft before flights to Iraq, etc, etc. In return for co-operation with these measures the bordering states are to be provided with cheap oil which the US will order Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to supply. It appears that such a new sanctions regime is unlikely to be agreed since many Arab states will oppose it and would only agree if the US forced Israel to make concessions in Palestine and on the return of the Golan Heights. Also it will be opposed by the US rivals, the EU, Russia and China.

It is therefore going to be difficult for the US to prevent Iraq strengthening itself economically, ending the air exclusion zones and re-arming. The position of US imperialism is weak and offers opportunities to its rivals. Russia has agreed to boost co-operation with Iraq in the oil sector and is known to be keen to resume military supplies. France and many other EU members are keen to end sanctions and begin exploitation of Iraqi oil. The US is considering a strategic retreat on sanctions as recommended in the Cheney energy report mentioned above.

### The price of imperialism

Whatever move the US makes next it is clear that the Gulf will remain a battlefield for imperialism. The US, which now has its forces permanently stationed in the Gulf, will not hesitate to use them.

The terrible price of imperialism's bloody struggles to control oil production and supply routes is being paid by the local populations. As has been said above these struggles are the direct result of the capitalist system of production and cannot be ended as long as the system persists. Under communism the world's resources would be shared on the basis of need and its economy would be developed to an agreed plan based on the needs of the world's population. But, to get to communism, capitalism must be destroyed. This can only be done by a working class con-

scious of its real interests, a working class, which has rejected the frauds of nationalism. As in Palestine, it is necessary to show that the fundamental divisions in society are class ones and the fundamental battle is one of class against class. As in Palestine, the first step on this road is the formation of a communist nucleus and the revival of the communist programme.

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# Class Consciousness and Working Class Political Organisations

## Part One: Idealism and Bourgeois Materialism

The issue of "consciousness" is one of the most important for the working class and for revolutionaries. Behind it lies the really big questions such as "how can capitalism be destroyed?". Some, impatient to bring about the end of a system which has plainly outlived its usefulness for the vast majority of humanity, have even despaired of the fight because "the working class has been bought off" or because "capitalist control of the media is so complete that workers can easily be fooled into accepting capitalist ideas". Others, like the Bordighists, will argue that the only way in which the proletariat actually exists as a class is if it forms a political party which is the sole expression of its revolutionary consciousness. Still others (and these seem to be a growing band today), believe the whole question of revolution will be posed without worrying about revolutionary consciousness at all. For them revolution is basically a spontaneous issue. It is our aim to address these, and other, issues here, but, to do so, we need to first remind ourselves how the whole issue of consciousness arose.

### Consciousness in general

Ideas do not come from nowhere. The source of ideas, or consciousness, has occupied the ideologists of class society for thousands of years. For them the great problem was the distinction between mind and matter, between the animal bodies of human beings and their capacity for abstract thought. In ancient society, particularly in Ancient Athens, philosophers like Plato and Aristotle saw ideas as being "innate", only being brought into the light of day by thought. For them the real world was the world of ideas and the material world contained only shadows or partial reflections of these ideas. The material world was thus a

secondary world dependent on the world of ideas, and without the world of ideas the material world would not exist at all. By studying the shadows and reflections in the secondary material world the wise man can come to know the world of ideas or the real world. Consciousness of the real world is attainable only to the philosophers who can undertake this study, the remainder of mankind are deceived by the world of shadows and consequently have false consciousness. It was no accident that such an idea was developed by a leisured class in a society where slaves did all the work and where labour was seen as something close to animal activity.

These Greek aristocrats are the earliest of what we would call the "idealists". For them, ideas have an existence independent of human activity and are the prime motive of all historical change. In some ways, this idealism was an advance on the later Christian philosophers of the feudal period such as Thomas Aquinas. He re-interpreted Aristotle's world-view for the spreading Christian Church. He placed the Judeo-Christian God (rather than The One in Greek philosophy) as the fount of human consciousness. For the Christians our thoughts belonged to the soul which departed the animal body after death. Long before the advent of Christianity, humanity, as a species that is aware that it is aware,

## Bilan & Perspectives



Bordeaux à Nantes, 1917

Le Marxisme du XXI<sup>me</sup> siècle  
Le Moyen-Orient au Bord du Gouffre  
La Classe Ouvrière face aux Attaques de la Bourgeoisie  
Vers la «Nouvelle Internationale»  
Un Grand Renégat à la Queue de Paon, Léon Trotsky  
7 novembre 2000 à Kiev

came to explain that awareness by discovering something outside itself in religion. Religion, throughout most of human history, was a substitute for science. Or as Marx put it in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*

*The gods in the beginning are not the cause but the effect of man's intellectual confusion.*  
op.cit. [Lawrence and Wishart, 1959, p82]

Throughout the Middle Ages, authority rather than reason became the doctrine of the Christian Church. Nature was external to human beings (alienated from them in philosophical terms) and this could not be fully understood by them as it was God-given. It was only under the impetus of the scientific revolution, which was predicated on the early development of capitalism, that this approach began to break down. The Copernican revolution overturned the Biblical and Ptolemaic understanding of the cosmos. This in turn opened up the way for crude materialist philosophy. This took several forms from the rationalism of Descartes (who came up with ideas only using reason – he boasted he made his best leaps in knowledge in bed!) to the empiricism of Bacon who had the merit of understanding that the world was a product of humanity's material existence. Bacon was the father of modern English empiricism in that he argued that what could not be proved by immediate experiment was unscientific. The same type of vulgar materialism can be found in the works of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Locke, both in science and politics, upheld the rule of law. For him scientists like Newton who systematised whole branches of knowledge (like physics and mechanics), gave new laws to explain the order of the universe. For Locke, the English "Glorious Revolution" of 1688-9 brought the same spirit of law and order to British society after the turbulence of the Civil War and Commonwealth. There was little room for the supernatural in either Newton's or Locke's view of the world, a fact which brought them both criticism from the established Church. Not surprisingly this initial bourgeois materialism developed strongest in

Britain, a country where capitalism and industrialism was already advancing rapidly. It was to remain so for a further century. Thus, "The summit of eighteenth century science was materialism" (Engels, *The Position of England in the Eighteenth Century*). This was certainly an advance since it established the fundamental basis of the materialist world outlook that: **All consciousness is derived from the material world and experience of this world.**

But, whilst this materialism was opposed to the spiritual subjectivism of religion, it could not seriously challenge it. This was due to several

reasons which can only be dealt with schematically here. In the first place, the rising bourgeoisie tended to see human nature as a constant that had not changed throughout history. They equated the rise in science and reason to something that was inevitable since they could not fully understand that it was the rise of a new mode of production dominated by themselves which had helped to precipitate it. Similarly, they viewed human beings simply as disconnected atoms. Thus they saw consciousness as being just about the individual as such and not about the role of the individual in society. This

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was why they were fascinated by the story of Alexander Selkirk, who lived for years on a desert island, and which was immortalised in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. All their works on economic behaviour started from this very bourgeois figure (who even has a manservant miraculously provided to do the labour!), as if it was an accurate explanation of how humanity had arrived at capitalism. Marx dismissed these fantasies as "Robinsonades" in his later writings. As to religion, the British could only throw up a sceptic like David Hume who argued that modern science had shown that we could not be sure about anything. The conclusion was that there probably was a God but as we could not communicate with him then we should live life as though he did not exist! A major problem for the bourgeoisie was that religion had a social function. As Napoleon brutally put it in 1802 "Simple people need religion". How would the masses respect morality if it was not for the restraints of religion?

The French Revolution, when "the people" turned into the "mob", drove the British bourgeoisie back to support for Church and King against the "godless French". The demands of social order demanded that science line up with the ruling class as expressed in Humphrey Davy's introductory discourse at the Royal Institution in 1802:

*The unequal division of property and of labour, the difference of rank and conditions amongst mankind, are the sources of power in civilised life, its moving causes and its very soul.*

Quoted in J.D. Bernal, *Science in History*, Vol. 2 (Pelican, 1969), p540

A perfect illustration that there is no separating science from society. No wonder they bricked up the door to the public gallery so that "rude mechanics" could not get in to hear it!

But the same French Revolution which led to the victory of Tory reaction in Britain had the opposite effect in the German-speaking world.

### The defeat of idealism

In Germany, a series of over 360 separate feudal and semi-feudal states until Napoleon defeated the Prussians

at Jena in 1806, idealist philosophy remained the dominant force in ruling class thinking. As Marx dubbed it, it was "the German ideology". And the dominant figure in this idealist world was G.W.F. Hegel. Hegel was in many ways a contradictory thinker. Influenced by the drama of the French Revolution, and even more directly by the Napoleonic conquests of Europe (Hegel himself witnessed the arrival of this "world historic spirit" in Jena), Hegel recognised that human History was not unchanging and that it had to be based on reality.

*What is actual is necessary in itself. Necessity consists in this, that the whole is sundered into the different concepts and that this divided whole yields a fixed and permanent determinacy. However this is not fossilised determinacy but one which permanently recreates itself in its dissolution.*

G. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (Oxford 1942 p. 283)

What Hegel gives us is a mechanism to understand change (the dialectic) and even a recognition that this must be rooted in reality. For Hegel though, reality only became real when philosophers recognise it in what he called "absolute spirit". This was actually a cover for God. Hegel's argument was that as man pursued his quest for understanding he would logically arrive at the Absolute or union with God. For Hegel the purpose of reason was to understand the mind of God. It had no concrete results.

*Die Philosophie ist in der Tat Gottesdienst. [Philosophy is, in fact, in the service of God]*

or, as he put it in another famous passage

*Philosophy comes too late to teach the world what it should be ... The owl of Minerva only flies when dusk has fallen.*

Preface to *Rechtsphilosophie*

But despite Hegel, ideas do have practical consequences. To argue that the purpose of thinking is merely to articulate what actually exists is to rationalise the *status quo*. Thus he ended by arguing (in post-Napoleonic Germany), that the Absolute ideal was the already existing Prussian State and Church. In

doing this, he not only did violence to his own ideas on historical change, but also split his followers. It was the debate on the legacy of Hegel which coincided with the development of capitalism and the bourgeoisie in Germany. And given the state of censorship at the period in which Metternich, the Austrian Chancellor crushed all liberal and national movements in German-speaking lands (through the German Bund formed in 1815), the debate was fought out in the obscure language of philosophy.

Most of Hegel's critical followers, the young Hegelians, were rooted out of the universities after the accession of Frederick William IV in 1840. This included Marx's own mentor Bruno Bauer and thus Marx himself. Marx now turned away from the academic to journalism. As a contributor, and later, editor, of the *Rheinische Zeitung* after 1841, Marx admitted that it was an important step on the road to his acceptance of communist ideas and what we now call historical materialism.

*I experienced for the first time the embarrassment of having to take part in discussions on so-called material interests.*

Preface to his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1843)

First though he had to settle accounts with his philosophical past. His experience of the conditions of the working class (as seen in his article on the "Debate on the Law on the Thefts of Timber" in October 1842) itself sharpened his attack not only on Hegel but also on his followers.

This was not something that occurred overnight. Marx was never content with the superficial (hence why *Capital* took nearly two decades in its gestation!). He had studied Hegel very carefully, and had initially tried to reject Hegel's thinking altogether, but, after intense study, he had succumbed to the powerful dialectical method Hegel employed. However, when he too realised the implications of Hegel's ideas, he joined the Young Hegelians who were beginning to criticise the master's thinking. Marx, however, soon began to diverge from them too, since they accepted Hegel's idealist concep-

tion of the dominance of ideas over reality. When Ludwig Feuerbach, in his "Preliminary Theses for the Reform of Philosophy" criticised Hegel's method as a "mystification" and put real flesh and blood human beings rather than God at the centre of philosophy, Marx enthusiastically greeted his work. However, even Feuerbach's materialism did not fully satisfy Marx's own developing views. In 1843, Marx was not yet a communist and was collaborating with Arnold Ruge on the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. Marx's second contribution to this was his "Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law". He starts this article by announcing once again the debt of German philosophers to Feuerbach.

*For Germany the criticism of religion has been essentially completed and criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism.* But then he goes on to say that religion does not arise as a "false consciousness" as Feuerbach has it. Religion arises because of the ways in which human beings have hitherto organised their social and political existence.

*The basis of irreligious criticism is: man makes religion, religion does not make man. But man is not an abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world because they are in an inverted world.*

Religion offered thus both a justification of the existing order and a source of consolation and rejection of it. The famous passage on it being the "opium of the people" is not merely a statement of atheism but also of the materialist basis of Marxism.

*The struggle against religion is therefore indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion. Religious suffering is the expression of real suffering and at the same time the protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the*

*opium of the people ... The criticism of religion is thus in embryo a criticism of the vale of tears whose halo is religion.*

Marx did not write much more on religion after this (another job left for Engels). The reason is clear. With the pronouncement in the same work that,

*Religion is only the illusory sun that revolves around man so long as he does not revolve about himself,*

Marx could now concentrate on what was the real issue of how human beings achieve their emancipation. Marx could not fall into the trap of the Young Hegelians by simply insisting that the world would change because their idealism was more rational than Hegel's. Marx criticised this view in yet another letter to Ruge.

*We do not then set ourselves opposite the world with a doctrinaire principle, saying "here is the truth, kneel down here!" It is out of the world's own principles that we develop for it new principles. We do not say to her, "stop your battles, they are stupid stuff. We want to preach the true slogans of battle at you." We merely show it what it is actually fighting about, and this realisation is a thing it must make its own even though it may not wish to.*

Correspondence (to Arnold Ruge?), September 1843, in D. McLellan (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (OUP 1977), pp37-8

The reform of consciousness consists solely in letting the world perceive its own consciousness by awaking it from dreaming about itself, in explaining to it its own actions.

This is an essential element of Marx's views of the inter-relationship of ideas and activity. They were both the product of human history. In the Preface to *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels basically take the piss out of the Young Hegelian's idealistic method.

*Hitherto men have constantly made up for themselves false conceptions about themselves, about what they are and what they ought to be. They have arranged their ideas about their relationships according to their ideas of*

*God, of normal man, etc. The phantoms of their brains have got out of their heads They, the creators, have bowed down before their creations. Let us liberate them from the chimeras, the ideas, dogmas, imaginary beings under the yoke of which they are pining away. Let us revolt against the rule of thoughts. Let us teach men, says one, to exchange these imaginations for thoughts which correspond to the essence of man: says the second, to take up the critical attitude to them, say the third, to knock them out of their heads; and – existing reality will collapse.*

Just in case anyone is doubting this is irony, Marx and Engels tell us that these are the innocent and child-like fancies of the Young Hegelians and they hammer the point about their idealism home with a further piece of satire.

*Once upon a time a valiant fellow had the idea that men were drowned in water only because they were possessed of the idea of gravity. If they were to knock this notion out of their heads, say, by stating it to be a superstition, a religious concept, they would be sublimely proof against any danger from water His whole life long he fought against the illusion of gravity, of whose harmful results all statistics brought him new and manifold evidence. This honest fellow was the type of the new revolutionary philosophers in Germany...*

*The German Ideology* in Karl Marx *Selected Writings* ed D. McLellan pp159-160

By now Marx had a problem. How could Germany which had a developed philosophy but a backward social structure participate in the emancipation of humanity?

*The weapon of criticism obviously cannot replace the criticism of weapons. Material force must be overthrown by material force. But theory also becomes material force when it grips the masses.*

But

*In Germany, by contrast, where practical life is as mindless as*

*mental life is impractical, no class in civil society has any need or capacity for general emancipation until it is forced to by its immediate condition, by material necessity, by its very chains.*

It only needed Marx to link together his theoretical evolution with his experience in dealing with "material questions" on the *Rheinische Zeitung* to discover that the class he was talking about was the working class, the proletariat. The only possibility for real emancipation lay

*in the formation of a class with radical chains, a class in civil society that is not of civil society; a class that is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere of society having universal character because of its universal suffering... a sphere, in short, that is the complete loss of humanity and can only redeem itself through the total redemption of humanity. The dissolution of society as a particular class is the proletariat.*

It is no accident that Marx was to be the theoretical leader of communism but he became so as not just from his own quest to understand how human

society had changed and would change over time. It was also due to the incipient rise of the proletariat at that time. Marx moved towards communism after he had gone to Paris and made contact with workers and the early French socialists in October 1843. Marxism as a method thus arose as a reflection of the growth of capitalism in Europe. The proletariat were identified as the really revolutionary class not as a sentimental whim, and even less because they were a simple Hegelian ideal antithesis, but because the proletariat above all was the one class of flesh and blood mortals which represented the very opposite of private property. And, in recognising the potential of the working class, Marx also gave to the proletariat the scientific basis for its own emancipation.

### Historical materialism

In the light of the above Marx and Engels made their strongest statement yet that their world-view was exactly the opposite of the idealism of Hegelianism. *The German Ideology* begins

*The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas but real premises from which abstraction can be made only in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. These premises can thus be verified in a purely empirical way.*

Karl Marx: *Selected Writings* (ed. D McLellan) p.160

This is why Marxism can never be compared to a religion. Religion requires only faith and its premises are unchallengeable. But every statement of Marxism has been verified in the real world<sup>1</sup>.

And this real world is dominated by human beings' need to solve the basic problems of existence.

*The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals ... (they) can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion, or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence.*

This and the famous passage in the *Preface to the Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* are the basic statements of historical materialism. However they are only "basic". Marx carries on the discussion to point out that the reproduction of material life is not just a mechanical process (as the Stalinists were to maintain in the 1930s). It is also the real life of these individuals and is historically conditioned by time and place.

*The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends first of all on the nature of the actual means of subsistence they find in existence and have to reproduce. This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the production of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of the activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their*

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*life, a definite mode of life on their part.*

(loc. cit. p.161)

And this is not all. In contrast to Feuerbach and other bourgeois materialists, who saw consciousness as an individual phenomenon resulting from the impact of sense perception, physical and even metabolic factors (e.g. diet)<sup>2</sup> on the isolated human being, Marx saw that variations in consciousness were due to their activity as human beings collectively in a society.

*The production of life, both of one's own in labour and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a double relationship: on the one hand as natural, on the other as a social relationship. By social we understand the co-operation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end. It follows from this that a certain mode of production, or industrial stage, is always combined with a certain mode of co-operation or social stage and this mode of co-operation is itself a "productive force".*

*The German Ideology* in Marx: Selected Works (ed. McLellan) p.166

Again this is one of the main criticisms of Feuerbach's materialism

*IX. The highest point attained by contemplative materialism, that is materialism that does not understand sensuousness as practical activity, is the contemplation of single individuals in "civil society".*

*Theses on Feuerbach* in McLellan edition.

Consciousness would not only vary historically but also through social relations and class position. Consciousness is thus not derived from the world individually as in bourgeois materialism but is a social and collective product.

*The sum total of these relations of production constitute economic structure of society, the real foundation ... to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness ... It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being*

*but their social being which determines their consciousness.*

*Preface to the Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* in MESW Vol 1 p.363. Our emphasis added.

Finally, in establishing the differences between historical materialism and bourgeois materialism, Marxist materialism is dialectical. Whereas bourgeois materialists saw individual human beings as passively receiving sensory imprints, which were then physiologically translated into consciousness, Marx argued that this was a "vulgar materialism". In reality, the raw material of experience is actively restructured by its recipients through thought (and since thought has a historical dimension, it also acts as part of the process of the development of consciousness), and they in turn react back on their experience. **Consciousness is not a direct product of experience but an indirect one. Consciousness is structured by and mediated by already existing patterns of understanding and thought.** This is the meaning of the first of the *Theses on Feuerbach*

*I. The chief defect of all previous materialism (including that of Feuerbach) is that things (Gegenstand) reality, the sensible world, are conceived only in the form of the objects (Objekt) of observation, but not as human sense activity, not as practical activity...*

*Theses on Feuerbach* from the Bottomore and Rubels edition. Original emphases.

**Consciousness, therefore, has to have a social and an historical dimension.** It was to underline this inter-relation of thought and practice at this point that Marx later adds the famous thesis that

*XI. The philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways, the point is to change it.*

But changing the world is the key to the issue. Marx's critique of German philosophy as "ideology" (in this sense, just speculation about human history) was worthless unless he could explain how the process of change could come about. In order to distance himself from the idealists Marx made it

clear that Communism wasn't just a sentimentally pleasant idea nor was it dreamed up in his head.

*Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.*

*The German Ideology* loc cit p.171

However materialism seemed to have erected a barrier to its own conclusions. The premises might have existed but where was the material movement? A few pages later Marx seems to offer no hope of proletarian emancipation at all.

*The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.*

loc. cit., p176

The truth of this statement is all too obvious in our own time where a handful of press magnates faithfully produce pap for the defence of their class interests on a daily basis. But if this is the case how can communism become "the real movement" in any shape or form? The answer given by Marxism and the proletariat will be examined in the next part of this article.

[to be continued]

## Notes

1 And yet there are some so-called Marxists who treat revolutionary activity as if it were a religion. Readers of our press will be aware that an organisation like the International Communist Current rejected for a decade our demand for evidence that the 1980's were "years of truth" for the working class. They responded that we were simply empiricists and that the course of history was towards revolution, not war. There are other serious errors in the ICC's conception of the working class (which, like the Bordighists, is close to the Hegelian abstraction of the class) but these will be dealt with later.

2 Summed up in the famous aphorism of Feuerbach "Man is what he eats", but this can also be found in Buchner's *Woyzeck*.

# The Balkans – Still the Powder Keg of Europe

In *Revolutionary Perspectives* 14 we wrote about the Kosovo crisis that

*This is only the beginning of new conflicts. The KLA's programme also calls for unity with Albanians everywhere including in Macedonia where 30% of the population are Albanian. If NATO does not attempt to hamper or halt the KLA then it might be a case of NATO fighting the KLA to maintain what little shred of integrity it has left.*

It therefore came as no surprise that Albanian guerrillas moving from Kosovo should begin to occupy a number of remote Albanian-speaking villages along the borders of Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo on February 16th. This area was supposedly patrolled by the KFOR troops of the UN. The Serbian Army was banned from it by the agreement of June 1999. Seeing the danger, NATO allowed the Serbs to re-enter the area (but without heavy weapons or the protection of armoured cars). Despite advice from NATO to negotiate, the Macedonian government was forced to take military action when Albanian guerrillas moving from Kosovo shelled the town of Tetovo on March 15th. The Macedonian government is a coalition of Slav and Albanian-speaking parties who have run the country since independence in 1991. Albanians in Macedonia have formal equality before the law and language recognition. However, until recently, there was no university in the Albanian-speaking areas, which also had the lowest incomes in the country. It was these factors that the Macedonian National Liberation Army (a splinter from the UCK (or KLA) in Kosovo) hoped to exploit when they moved into the country. The first attach was on Tetovo which is actually Macedonia's richest town, having benefited from almost a decade of smuggling and drugs trafficking. A new Free University has just been established there and the day before they

began shelling the town the MNLA had had organised an Albanian demonstration there. About 10 MNLA gunmen were hidden amongst the demonstrators. They opened fire on police in an attempt to provoke police murders of Albanians and create a few martyrs for the cause. National liberation movements today are often nothing but gangster movements.

More evidence for this can be found in Kosovo. In the light of the number of KLA members killed in the war with



Milosevic's Yugoslav Army, young Albanians in Kosovo joined their ranks as a patriotic duty. And the KLA basically took control of the province, driving out the Serb, Roma (gypsies) and Goran (Albanian-speaking Muslim Slavs) minorities. In September 1999 NATO allowed the KLA to become the Kosovo Protection Corps (a bit like asking Nazi Stormtroopers to take over the police force). However as they became more dominant they turned to criminal rackets, personal vendettas and police brutality. The popularity of

the KLA in Kosovo began to wane. When they attempted to win electoral legitimacy as the Kosovo Democratic Party (PDK) against the supposedly discredited Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) (because its leader, Ibrahim Rugova, had tried to negotiate with Milosevic) they were soundly beaten. In the municipal elections of October last year the LDK got 58% of the vote whilst the PDK got 27% and the even more ultra-nationalist Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) 8%. With Milosevic overthrown earlier in the same month the ultra-nationalists had lost one of the biggest factors in their support. The KLA began to break up. Some older-style politicians like Thaci (leader of the PDK) tried to distance themselves from the Greater Albania project and, under pressure from NATO governments entered into negotiations with the new Kostunica government in Belgrade. As Kostunica was himself trying to win the backing of the same powers to get sanctions lifted and Serbian re-integrated into the trading system it seemed as though everything had turned out nicely for NATO.

But the ultra-nationalist Kosovar splinters from the KLA now founded new guerrilla outfits like the MNLA and the UCPMB or, in English, PMBLA. The PMBLA are the Presevo-Medvedja-Bujanovac Liberation Army. According to *Le Monde Diplomatique* (April 2001)

*The PMBLA established their headquarters in Mali Trnovac and took control of the large town of Veliki Trnovac, a local centre for drugs and arms trafficking and prostitution. Their rear base is in Gnjilane, the centre of the American sector of KFOR. While the British KFOR soldiers prevented all contact with Medvedja, their US counterparts waited until the end of December before bombing the PMBLA's supply routes.*

By this time the ultra-nationalists had begun a series of provocations to try to draw the fire of the Serbs. Although the length of the PMBLA's title seems like a joke, the three towns from which they take their name are in the 5 km wide buffer zone in Serbia proper on the Kosovo border. 70 000 Albanian-speakers live there. It was supposedly patrolled by KFOR troops to keep the peace. But as the quote makes clear the US contingent of KFOR ignored the infiltration of this new organisation until it began raiding the towns.

The Kostunica government followed NATO instructions and negotiated with the PMBLA. In return, KFOR stepped up its patrols (especially after the PMBLA threatened the main Vienna to Thessaloniki highway which goes through Bujanovac in the Presevo Valley). As a result the PMBLA were eventually neutralised. This led the Greater Albanian nationalists to switch their attention to Macedonia and the MNLA attacks, which we mentioned at the start of this article.

### Behind ethnic conflict in the Balkans lurk the Great Powers

Nationalism may be reactionary but in the modern world it does not operate successfully on its own. Nationalist movements need to find backers amongst the countries which dominate the world market. If you look in the press currently you will find that the only reference to the activity of EU states and the US in the Balkans are to their peacekeeping roles. Headlines like "Kosovo Rebels Warned End Violence or Lose Aid" (*Financial Times*, 24th February) imply that the EU and US are only in the Balkans due to the ethnic hatred of the inhabitants. Few

remember that it was 700 NATO bombers using laser-guided missiles, which precipitated Milosevic's, ethnic cleansing of Kosovo. Even fewer remember that the collapse of Yugoslavia, which began all the current ethnic fighting, was started by the green light the German government gave to the Slovenian and Croatian secession from Yugoslavia in 1990. As Yugoslavia was already at that time in deep economic crisis, the secession of its two richest parts

ago, a landslide victory for the secessionists would have been easy, but, with the fall of Milosevic and the installation of the pro-EU Government of Kostunica in Serbia, the political map has changed. The ruling coalition only won a narrow majority and the parties which wish to remain in Yugoslavia were only 2% behind in the vote. The EU is already putting pressure on Djukanovic not to hold the referendum and the Montenegrin elite has been threatened with the ending of international aid if it goes ahead. The European bosses fear more instability, and point to the fact that the Albanian minority in Montenegro would become the next target of the Greater Albania nationalists operating from Kosovo, if Montenegro were independent. The one coherent entity in the area is the former Yugoslav Army and they would be withdrawn if Montenegro left Yugoslavia.



could only have provoked war. The war too could not be confined once each national ruling elite decided on its own course. It was this, which ultimately devastated Bosnia.

And despite the Dayton Accord of 1995 the process has not stopped there. Elections in Montenegro, the last independent entity to remain in the old Yugoslavia alongside Serbia, have returned, by a narrow majority, the ruling coalition of Prime Minister Djukanovic. Djukanovic's faction seems to be a puppet of the German ruling class. Despite their narrow victory, this faction have repeated their intention to hold a referendum to make Montenegro independent of Serbia. Already the Yugoslav Dinar has been replaced by the German Deutschmark and the aim of the secessionists is to integrate faster with Western Europe (or, at least, benefit directly from international aid rather than receive it via Serbia). A year

At the same time the Dayton Accord which was supposed to preserve peace in Bosnia is in a state of crisis. The Croat soldiers of the Bosnian Army have already mutinied and the majority of the 7500 soldiers have left it. This followed the establishment of a Bosnian Croat national congress at the beginning of March to pave the way for a new Herzog-Bosnia statelet. The disintegration of Yugoslavia, which was actively promoted at different times by different powers in different zones (except Russia, which continues to support Yugoslavia even in its Serbian rump form), has thus not yet stopped. The question for the Great Powers is now "where will it all end?".

### The Significance of Macedonia

Macedonia has the capacity to generate further conflict in the

Balkans. Even its name implies disorder. It has given the Italians, and the French (Macedoine), their words for "fruit salad" and "hotchpotch" of various bits. Macedonia has already caused two wars in the last hundred years. It was the cause of the two Balkan Wars of 1912-13 when the Balkan League of Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Rumania attacked the Ottoman Empire's last remaining European territory. Macedonia was split up as result. The southern part went to Greece whilst the current state of Macedonia went to Serbia. This was confirmed when these two then defeated Bulgaria to take most of Macedonia for themselves. Today Macedonia is known as the FYR (Former Yugoslav Republic) of Macedonia so that it does not offend the Greeks by implying that it wants Southern Macedonia (which includes the port of Thessaloniki) back. Thus, even the name is a result of international pressure on Skopje. The outcome of the Balkan wars was the increase in size of Serbia. This Austria-Hungary regarded as a threat and this is why the First World War broke out in 1914.

However we are not in the same situation today. In 1914 there had been thirty years of manoeuvring amongst the Great Powers to get the imperialist line-up that eventually took the world into catastrophe in 1914. The blocs had only just been in existence for 7 years by 1914 but had become increasingly consolidated in the period up to 1914. Today we are still in a period of shifting interests and therefore shifting alliances. The fall of the USSR has not created George Bush Senior's "New World Order", but a series of wars around the planet financed or supported by one or other of the local and global imperialist powers.

Despite all the propaganda that the "international community" is only in the Balkans for "humanitarian reasons", the truth is that each of the leading states is really making sure that it looks after its own strategic and economic interests in the area. The USA has had thousands of troops in Macedonia since 1990, and the biggest army base in Europe in Bosnia. The US basically wants to put a lid on matters. But this is not easy since the forces it creates and uses take on a life of their own and

create further turmoil. Milosevic, for example, who they used to reign back the Bosnian Serbs and who was seen as the key to the Dayton Agreement, had to be fought in Kosovo. The KLA who were the US tool in Kosovo are now further destabilising Macedonia and Presevo. In fact the US seemed to be giving the KLA free hand (which led to the latest attacks on Macedonia) to put pressure on the Kostunica Government to hand over Milosevic.

Since last October, the Kostunica government, for its part, has been desperate to win respectable status for Serbia, particularly with EU states like Britain and France. For the US being respectable meant handing over Milosevic to the war crimes court sitting in the Hague. Kostunica could not comply with this KFOR demand without giving ammunition to the ultra-nationalists in Serbia. Instead he decided on the final day of a US deadline to arrest Milosevic, not as a war criminal, but for corruption. This will allow the Serb ruling class to show that they don't run a "rogue state" (i.e., a thorn in Western sides), whilst at the same time it does not make them look like a complete poodle of NATO. It means that the current Serb interests lie in re-building its old links to France and Britain (since Russia is economically of little use to rebuilding a country devastated by economic crisis and war).

Whatever happens next the main imperialist powers have created the framework for more anarchy and chaos. The current manoeuvring inside NATO and the EU over control of the new EU defence force shows that behind the formal polite exchanges there is a struggle for independence. Whilst some agendas are more transparent than others (e.g. the French desire to break from US control of EU military deployment) all of the powers are either scrambling to win US approval for their policies or are quietly preparing to further their own economic and strategic interests.

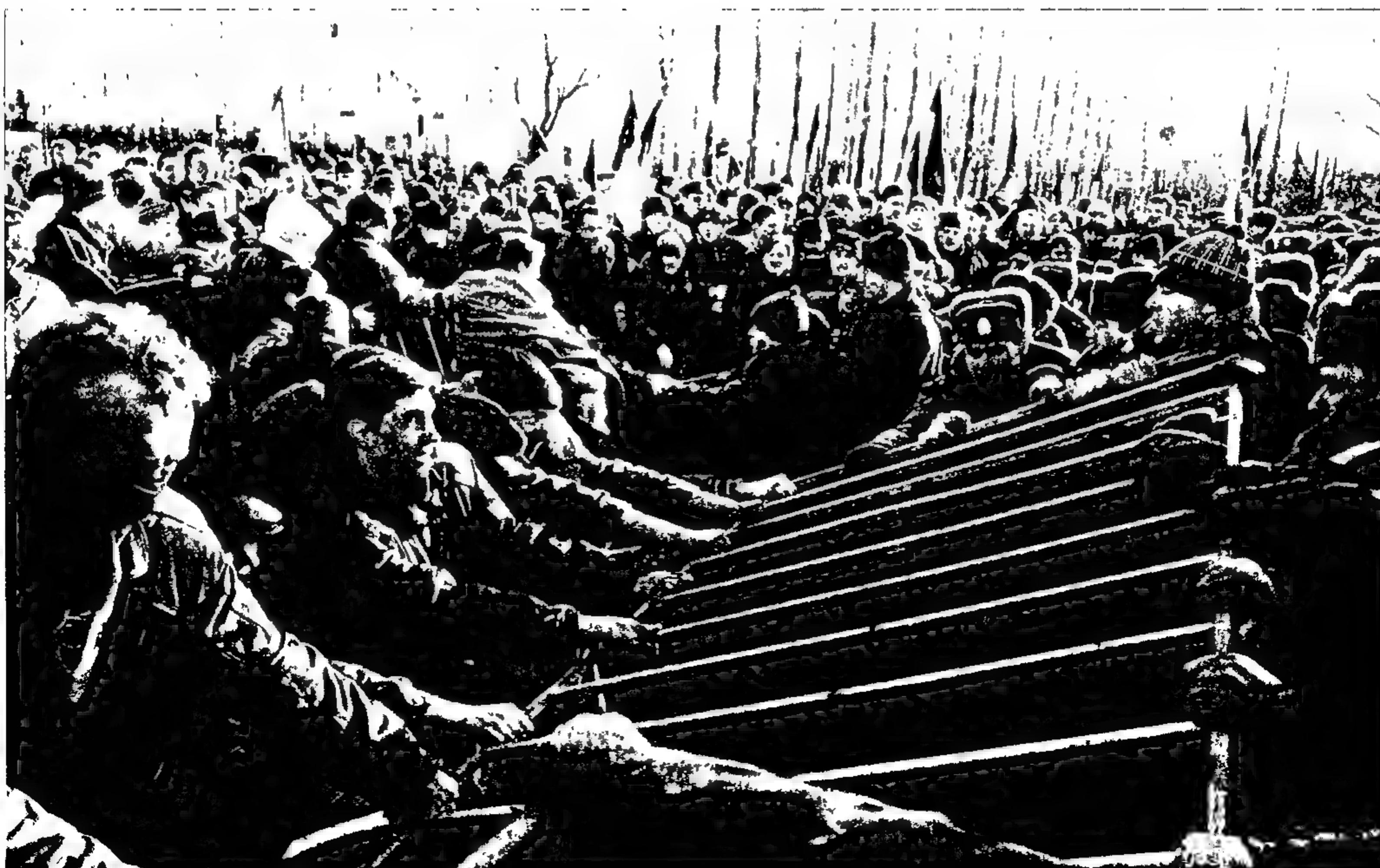
Much has been made of the new Bush administration's new policy of confrontation, but it is unlikely to be as clear cut as the press is making out. A Republican President elected by big business, especially the oil and arms

manufacturing sectors, is not going to flinch from pushing hard for their interests on the international stage. Traditionally Republican governments are more isolationist and more likely to go in for a new Star Wars policy (lots of big defence contracts for their pals) but they are also likely to be more unilateral in actions against those they see as enemies. It could be just enough of a change to open up the road to the formation of new blocs.

But the only end to this sorry cycle of national conflict promoted by imperialist godfathers is the end of the capitalist system itself. It is no accident that these wars flourish at times when the working class is politically absent and economically battered. The Yugoslav working class was probably less nationalistic than other workers in 1989. There was a massive strike wave throughout Serbia when Milosevic began to play the nationalist card to his peasant heartland. The wars allowed strikes to be outlawed and the subsequent economic destruction of Serbia removed the working class from the centre of the political stage. It will only be when the working class has begun to recover and reorganise that we will be able to talk about the possibility to end the root cause of instability in the Balkans. Even then this will have to be in concert with workers in the main imperialist powers since the murderous interventions of these powers will have to be neutralised. It is a long term and seemingly distant perspective but is more realistic than expecting the sharks and charlatans who run the international capitalist system to suddenly discover a peace which a century of imperialism has been unable to provide.

J.

# Ukrainian Communist Fight for Independent Working Class Interests



*A fight between capitalist and imperialist interests. Demonstrators supporting the pro-West Prime Minister against the pro-Moscow President fight with police in Kiev*

We are publishing below a leaflet given out by the Radical Communists of the Ukraine at a demonstration in Kiev. The group openly proclaims its support for the political framework of the IBRP and this, in itself, requires some courage in the context of the present-day Ukraine. There they face not only a fight between two bourgeois factions (the pro-US prime minister Yushchenko's faction and the pro-Moscow President Kuchma's faction) but also their little helpers. The pro-US faction has the support on the streets of the proto-fascist UNA-UNSO whilst the various social democrats and ex-Stalinists still maintain the lie that the old USSR was "socialist" rather than state capitalist and despite Kuchma's privatisations (in favour of Russian-based monopoly capitalism) they still maintain that he is closer to "socialism" presumably because he maintains a KGB police apparatus (now called the SBU). There can be no clearer indication of the imperialist struggle in the area than the open support given to the two central ruling factions from

Russia and the West. For the moment the West are on the retreat but Kuchma faces the public scandal of having been heard on tape authorising the murder of a bourgeois opposition journalist, Georgii Gongadze. More significantly the Yushchenko faction have the formidable support of the EU and the USA so this episode is not the last word on the subject.

We hope it will not be the last word from our comrades of the RKU either. They have refused to join any of the factions or any of the manoeuvres of the Left United Front (a ragbag of Trotskyists and Stalinists which mainly fights the fascists but does not stand for any independent working class programme) and have stoutly defended the need for the working class themselves to form their own organisations to defend their own living standards against all the vultures of the bourgeoisie. We can only solidarise with their efforts and wish them every success in this work. We look forward to a long and fruitful dialogue with them.

CWO

# Workers!

Today on Kiev's streets and squares you can see the sharp fighting between two bourgeois clans – president Leonid Kuchma, who is mainly oriented towards Russian transnational corporations in close alliance with local oligarchs, and prime minister Viktor Yushchenko – a direct representative of the IMF and similar international financial organisations. The working class have no interest in this fighting, both bourgeois elite groups are equally alien to them. The present president, Kuchma, who continues to serve the interests of primarily Russian capital and its satellites, as he has already done for a lot of years during which the condition of the working class has become much worse, undoubtedly has to go. But the pro-West ultra-liberal group of prime minister Yushchenko threatens with "shock therapy" and can only worsen the state of the working class.

Bourgeois ideology has penetrated into the working class with the help of social democratic parties and organisations as well as trade unions. As they are, they suppress working class at-

tempts to resist the influence of the crisis. Today you can see how the different Stalinist, Trotskyist and other groups try to push you to support one or another bourgeois faction. But it's necessary to clearly recognise that today such organisations are inalienable tools of capitalist totalitarianism, which have nothing in common with the interests of the working class.

Neither attempts by the capitalist state to abolish or regulate the operation of the law of value or, moreover, unachievable fantasies for this law to operate freely without restrictions (so-called law of the market) can solve the problem of world crisis in the capitalist economy.

The present crisis again demonstrates that the main contradiction between the social character of labour and the private form of appropriation remains, irrespective of the concrete legal form of bourgeois ownership of production on the one hand and the changing form of the social character of wage labour on the other hand.

Only world proletarian revolution can solve the problems of the working class – in Ukraine, Russia, USA – through-

out the globe. However, such a revolution will be successful only under the condition that the revolutionary organisation – the communist party, which leads the class, is correspondingly developed and prepared for a frontal attack against the political enemies of the revolutionary programme. But at the present time such a party still has not been formed. The International Bureau For the Revolutionary Party (IBRP) is the organisation which aims to be the focus for co-ordination and unification of different "national" organisations, which may form such party. For these reasons we, Radical Communists of Ukraine, are standing on the IBRP positions and call all conscious workers to join us for strengthening such "national" organisation here in Ukraine with the aim of further fusion into the international party.

If you agree with us – join us!

Long lives the proletarian revolution!

**Radical Communists of Ukraine**

March 2001

## Revolutionary Perspectives Back Issues

*Magazine of the Communist Workers' Organisation*

**1: Spain 1936; Engels; Islam; Strikes in France; Dayton; US Domination; Israel After Rabin**

**2: Communist Manifesto; From Capitalism to Communism; Ireland; SLP; JSA; 1926**

**3: Middle East; Spanish War, 1936; Class Struggle; Germany's Crisis; Russia; Elections**

**4: Labour; Crisis and Welfare State; Unemployed; Middle East; Ireland; Leninism; Racism, Sexism and Communism**

**5: Globalisation; WTO; Welfare Cuts; CWO Perspectives; Strikes in France; Ireland**

**6: Intern'l Class Struggle; Cap'list Crisis; Labour; Parl'tarism; German Communist Left; Deng; Imp'lism in Africa; Racism and Communism**

**7: Labour; US Welfare Cuts; US in Asia; Palestinian Question; Italian Imperialism in Albania; Against Wage Labour**

**8: October Revolution Today; UPS; ME War Process; Labour – Party of International Capital; SDPD in WWI; Toothless Tigers**

**9: Nation or Class; Hard Labour; Asian Tigers; ME War Process; The October Revolution Today; Letters; Indian Workers Appeal**

**10: Akers McNulty Strike; Student Struggle; 150 Years of Struggle; KAPD and Nat'l Bolshevism; The Firing Line (pt 1); The Gulf; The Great Game**

**11: Japan – Global Capitalism's Setting Sun; New Deal; Indonesia; In the Firing Line (pt 2); Israel, US Protégé; Russia**

**12: Multinationals; Imperialism in C. Africa; Labour's Lost Jobs; US Social Security; Russian texts; Parliament; May '68**

**13: New Labour; Pinochet; Cuba; Brazil; Globalisation; US and Iraq; 20 years after the Shah**

**14: Yugoslavia; Asylum Bill; London Bombings; Food Crises; Trade Wars; Colombia; Nat'l Lib'n in Africa; Debt Crisis**

**15: Ford, Spark's Strikes; Capit'm's Disasters; N.Ireland; E.Timor; Caucasus; Colombian Strikes; S Pankhurst; Iran; China**

**16: Seattle; Call Centre Strikes; Rank and Filism; British Working Class; Nationalisation is Capitalist; KAPD; Barbarism in the Caucasus**

**17: The Death of Rover; Haider; New Immigration Law; 100 Years of Labour; Incinerators; Welfare; Oil and the US; Russia; Ecuador; Unions and Struggle**

**18: Our Anti-capitalism; Global Crisis Kills; Sierra Leone; UN; Zimbabwe; ME; Vietnam; Ecuador; Globalisation; Tottenham Election; N.Ireland**

**19: Yugoslavia; Middle East "Peace"; Germany 1921; Review: Wheen on Marx; Slavery and Child Labour; Euro; Petrol Blockade; Ecuador; Peru; Colombia; Strikes in LA; Women's March against Poverty**

**Back issues are available £2 (plus 50p postage in UK or £1 elsewhere) from the group address.**

# Spies over China

## Imperialist relations

The collision between the US EP-3 spy plane and one of a pair of Chinese airforce fighters sent to monitor it represents a window into the relations between imperialist powers across the world.

It is already clear that the US bourgeoisie will use its military muscle to defend its economic and strategic interests: the example of the war with Iraq shows its willingness to back up its control of sources of oil with force, and that of the Balkans demonstrates its ruthlessness in maintaining a presence in, and thus, aiding its control over, Europe.

The vast expense of the US surveillance of China is evidence that the American bourgeoisie regards China as at least a *potential* enemy in future conflicts. As well as the expense, there is also the risk that American technological secrets will be exposed. The Chinese military seem to be taking the US example to heart when it comes to dealing with captured 'planes. In 1976, the US got its hands on a defecting Russian's MiG fighter and sent it back to Moscow in boxes, after examining it in extensive detail!

But, the US backing down in offering a (fairly weak) apology for the incident, which resulted in the death of a Chinese pilot, indicates that any loss of face for US imperialism (and Bush) is outweighed by other considerations for the USA.

China, too, backed down in releasing the spy plane's crew and in censoring the more extreme anti-American views, because a profound rift between China and the US is not yet in Chinese interests.

Although the immediate tension has gone out of

this incident, it highlights the fact that the balance of power, which has existed in this region since the Second World War, is being challenged. This challenge represents the first steps of the building of a power block in the region. Although the contours of such a bloc are not yet clear, it will come to challenge the dominance of the US.

Japan is the principal economic power of South East Asia and the US's main ally. 40 000 US troops are stationed there and it was from Japan that the US spy plane set out. There is, however, evident tension in the Japan/US relationship. The principal cause is the economic competition between the two powers, but recently this tension has found expression in other incidents. One of these was the sinking of a Japanese training ship by a US submarine. Another is the continual atrocities, such as raping schoolgirls, committed by US troops stationed in Japan. Sections of the Japanese bourgeoisie now call for the removal of Japanese troops and the new Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi had demanded the revision of the post war constitution to enable the Japanese defence forces to wage offensive actions. These events are a clear echo of similar moves in Germany.

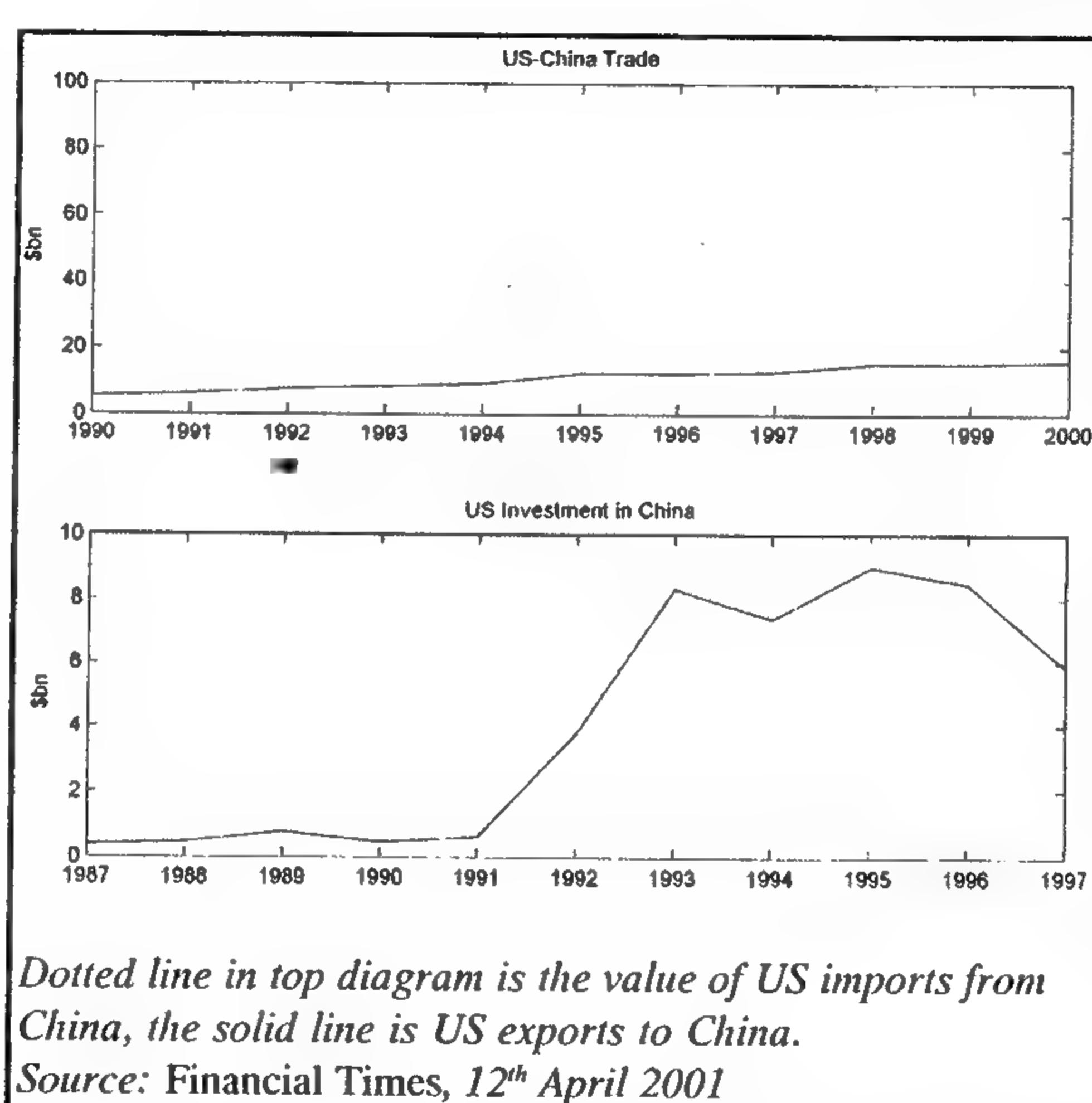
China is a rival of the US in many areas of the world. The bombing of its embassy in Belgrade by the US in 1999 was a warning that the US would not tolerate the Chinese helping its enemies. China has ignored this warning and was evidently helping Iraq rebuild its air defences. After the US bombing of Baghdad in February the US announced that Chinese technicians were working at the sites bombed and that the raid had been carried out on a Friday to avoid killing them. The Chinese, for their part, have announced an 18% increase in their military budget for 2001.

Both China and Japan are unhappy with the status quo and are looking for ways to revise it. The US, of course, is keen to keep its dominance over the area, which is its most important trading partner.

## Economic ties

The trade between the US and China has grown massively over the past decade as is shown in the Figure. Access to cheap Chinese goods brings obvious benefits to the American bourgeoisie, and their Chinese counterparts are given the opportunity to realise the surplus value they squeeze from the Chinese working class, whose low wages are part of the reason for the cheapness of the goods. Moreover, the American bourgeoisie have been able, since the famous "opening-up" or economic liberalisation of China, to directly participate themselves in the exploitation of the Chinese working class by investing in the country.

This mutually beneficial relationship between the American and Chinese bourgeoisies helps to offset the effect of the falling rate of profit for both coun-



tries, and it is not to be sacrificed while the economic pressures are not too great. However, the very same pressures which today cement the Sino-American relationship are also the cause of antagonisms which lead the two sides to spy on each other, as each side wishes to obtain the lion's share of the benefit. And the same dialectic of antagonism and mutual benefit holds for relations between the US and China and every other bourgeoisie with which they come into contact, with the balance on either the side of mutual benefit or of antagonism.

As capitalism's rhythm of mini-boom and renewed crisis unfolds, always imposed on a background of a decline, the antagonistic element in the relationship between any pair of bourgeoisies tends to come to the fore. If it were not for the fact that, for example, Sino-Japanese relations interfere with US-Taiwanese relations, and so on this would be more apparent. Hostile relations between a pair of powers result in both seeking allies, so antagonism in one part of the imperialist system produces a reduction of antagonism elsewhere.

The end result of this process is the emergence of rival coalitions of powers, and when these coalitions are sufficiently equal that each can stand up to the other, all that is missing for generalised conflict is a sufficiently powerful threat to the vital interests of one of the contending alliances by one of the others.

In today's world, the US is overwhelming the most powerful imperialist. Its obvious overall strategic aim is to remain in this position of superiority, but, every time it uses its strength, it immediately demonstrates the "unfair" advantages it has over its competitors, and provides a powerful incentive for its rivals to put themselves in a position to challenge it. Eventually, the US will be faced by challengers, and it will have to retain sufficient allies to rebuff these.

### Strategy in East Asia

The US, on the surface at least, regards China to be its most likely future enemy in East Asia. In terms of today's economic and technological

power, the US would probably be better off with Japan as an ally and China as an opponent than the other way round, even taking into account the manpower at the disposal of the Chinese army. However, these alternatives do not exhaust the possibilities. It is perfectly possible that the US could have both, or neither, as allies in a future conflict. All the powers in the region, and those from outside, which are active there, realise that they live in times, which are uncertain, and do not wish to pre-empt their future choices.

For example, both the US and Japan have historically courted the Taiwanese government, while at the same time mouthing the ritual reassurances to China that they recognise Beijing's sovereignty over what the Chinese call their "breakaway province". Tokyo has recently given permission to Taiwanese ex-President Lee Tenghui to visit Japan for medical treatment in the face of vigorous protests from Beijing, which suspects that Lee is actually seeking Japanese support for a formal declaration of Taiwanese independence.

The US has just scaled down the technological content of the weapons systems it will supply to Taiwan in the future. Instead of supplying warships equipped with Aegis radar systems, which would enable the Taiwanese to knock out mainland missiles in the air and to target many enemy vessels at once (according to *The Independent*, 24<sup>th</sup> April), more out-of-date weaponry will be traded. This response to Chinese pressure is, despite Bush's appearance as a man who talks loudly but wields a small stick, not a sign that the US is going soft. Rather, the presence of a moron in the White House is no real impediment to an intelligent foreign policy which puts nothing — and certainly not US law, which demands the defence of Taiwan — above the US's strategic and economic interests.

And the US is still arming Taiwan and supporting its protests against mainland rocketry pointed in its direction. Taiwan is a useful lever for US policy and will be supported to the extent that this remains true. Supplying Aegis would both upset the Chinese bourgeoisie of the mainland too much and give the Taiwanese an unacceptable

degree of independence — from the US.

### What can seen and what can't

For Marxists, it is clear that capitalism cannot ever be transformed into an essentially peaceful system. The world is bristling with weapons, which are maintained at their full lethal capacity and are frequently deployed. The back up, like the world's various spying systems, for these tools of murder are also kept busy. But we can go further and say that the present "peace" (defined as the absence of generalised war — not as the absence of war full stop) will not last. If the capitalists are unable to find a peaceful solution to their crisis, they will turn more and more to warlike ones. Although the US seems to have an unassailable military domination, no other bourgeoisie will be happy to leave the fruits of that domination to the US. The others will either have to be given some of those fruits, or they will combine and plough resources into catching up with the US militarily. The contours of those combinations cannot yet be discerned, but they will arise. And when they emerge to the degree where the US (and whatever allies it can buy) can be challenged, then generalised war will be the order of the day.

Assuming that capitalism persists, *this is inevitable, as there are two only solutions to the capitalist crisis. One is the mass destruction of capital that a generalised war would bring, which would allow decadent capital's cycle of reconstruction — crisis — war to pass onto its next stage. The other is the overthrow of capital.*

EDL

*We are publishing below an article taken from Internationalist Notes (US) a sympathising group of the IBRP. This text illustrates, as we have always*

*argued, that the role of Trade Unions is the same the world over — the defence of capitalism.*

## In the USA

# Unions Oversee Defeats for Workers

**W**orkers at Domino Sugar's Brooklyn Plant went on strike June 15<sup>th</sup> 1999. Exactly 20 months later the remaining strikers returned beaten. It took until April of 2000 before any of the striking workers crossed the picket line and went back to work. This defeat, led by the International Longshoreman's Association, representing the workers of ILA Local 1814, was particularly stark. The official grievances put forward against the company involved the right to work a 40-hour week, to put a stop to job cuts and the continuation of seniority rights. The company, owned by Tate & Lyle of London, plans to eliminate 110 jobs and introduce measures to improve productivity. The details of the contract were still largely unknown to workers at the time they voted to end the strike and accept the new contract. It is natural then that the workers involved in the strike feel that the unions have stabbed them in the back. However, far from betraying anyone the unions fulfilled their mission as the brokers of concessions on behalf of the capitalists.

Even when an actual settlement representing something more than a complete capitulation is reached, the bargain invariably ends up working on behalf of the employer who is not necessarily bound to live up to all the terms of the contract agreed to in the first

place. For instance, not two months after going back to work workers of the Seattle Times now are finding that the company is not going to hire them back like they thought they were promised.

Ninety-six of the newsroom workers have not been called back and twenty-two of the composing room workers have still not been called back. Basically the offer agreed to by union officials allowed the company to "discipline or discharge" all workers that had taken part in any sort of "misconduct or unprotected activity" during the strike. It also stipulates that all charges of unfair labor practices against the company shall be dropped. The contract further states that all "replacement" workers shall be displaced by returning strikers, but even here the company has a get-out in the form of a lengthy and complicated timetable for the return of the striking workers.

All the unions representing those working for the major airlines are going through their contract negotiations and all three of the biggest US carriers, American, United and Delta face potential strikes. United Airlines workers have been working without a contract since July 12, 2000. With the company alleging that mechanics were taking illegal workplace actions by following safety procedures and thus keeping aircraft grounded. Even such job actions as slow downs [work to rule] are

as easy to stop as it is to issue a court injunction.

Further actions are threatened by Northwest mechanics whose unions are also currently engaged in bargaining. Here the hand of the state is much more visible, with the government extending a "cooling-off" period that is coupled with the implicit threat of state intervention to prevent strikes from taking place at all if contract talks between the union and the company are not resolved. The threat coming from the White House itself is that they will not allow any strikes to disrupt the airline industry this year. Similarly, the Railway Labor Act officially gives the government the right to intervene forcibly against strikes that are deemed to threaten transportation — as the Reagan administration did when he called in the army to break the PATCO strike in 1981. These threats further aid the airline companies in their contract negotiations and allows unions a way of giving in to employers' contract demands without causing too much anger among workers.

This is all perfectly legal and democratic despite workers' protests that they were being denied their "right to strike", this "right" does not apply to transport workers. The main complaint from workers regarding this government intervention in a labor dispute was that it showed all too much that the gov-

IBRP sympathisers in North America:  
**Internationalist Notes (US)**

Write for contact and a free copy to:  
**IN, Box 1531,  
Eau Claire, WI 54702, USA.**

**Los Angeles Workers Voice [LAWV]**

For contact, write to:

**Box 57483,  
Los Angeles,  
CA 90057, USA.**

**Internationalist Notes (Canada)**

For contact, write to:

**C.P. 266, Succ. C  
Montreal, QC, Canada.**

ernment was not neutral in this dispute. Yet the state — whether formally democratic or not — is not a neutral social player and no reform or change of faces in the parliaments or Congresses of the capitalist class can make it so.

### Unions' Role is to Head off Working Class Resistance

Unions stand over and against the workers and their struggles. Even though unions were originally created by workers themselves to defend their own interests, in the current period they are institutions, which serve capital. It is of paramount importance that the ruling class controls all organizations that encompass workers. In the past the prime function of unions was simply to bargain with the employers and thus help maintain the minimum value of the cost of labor power and so support workers' living standards. Today, particularly given the crisis in which capitalism finds itself, unions can only bargain over what amount of losses workers will have to suffer. More and more we find the workplace decentralized and broken down into smaller, easier to control, units and more and more we find that unions stand over an ever-diminishing minority of the working class. Cheap, non-union labor is a feature of today's globalised capitalism but it would be a mistake to think that unionization of the workplace is going to stop the bosses in their tracks.

Some might have us believe that the main problem surrounding unions is a question of who leads the union. For these forces the problem can simply be corrected by putting the unions in the hands of better masters. By definition the unions exist to broker a deal with capital. When the bosses tell them that there's no more money in the kitty and that they'll have to shut down the firm or sack a number of workers, their job is to come up with a 'realistic solution'; realistic for the bosses that is. This is true irrespective of whether the union leader is a leftwing, militant or complete lick-spittle union hack. For the workers involved this often means losing the struggle. When workers lose a strike it serves to discipline them. With the knowledge that they cannot win

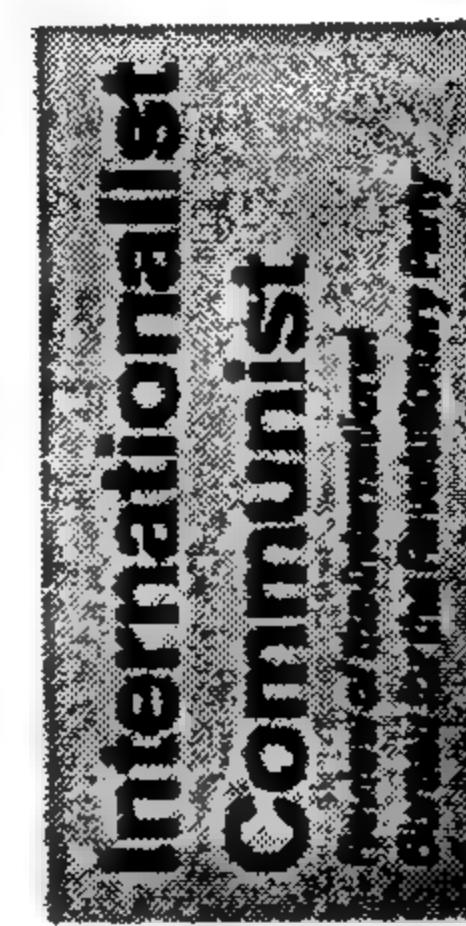
even with the union, many workers think it's not worth even trying to press their own demands — this is the inevitable outcome of the logic of the "union movement" today.

Over the course of the early part of the twentieth century the role of unions irrevocably changed. This became especially clear to the capitalist class after the first attempts of workers, from 1917 to 1921, to challenge the rule of capital. When workers really do start fighting on their own account the unions come into their own as the best ally of capital and the wages system.

This means that for workers to succeed in their struggles they must circumvent the unions and seek to spread struggles as far as possible among other workers. They cannot afford to keep being sucked into the trap of a long lonely strike like that perpetrated against the Domino Sugar workers.

They must, in short, be prepared to fight their own struggles, hold regular mass meetings with elected, recallable delegates and advance their own demands outside and against the unions.

AS, Internationalist Notes USA



### Towards the New International



\$28 Prague

US Boom:  
Triumph of the Paper Economy

The Working Class and the  
War in Chechnya

Correspondence with  
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Ukraine

Public Sector Strike in  
Colombia

The Working Class and  
Elections in Iran



# Mexico – A Social Timebomb

The victory of Vincente Fox Quesada of the National Action Party (PAN) in the Mexican election of 2000 represented a victory for US imperialism. It was welcomed by the Clinton administration as a step forward for NAFTA. The implementation of NAFTA in 1993, brought with it more direct domination of Mexico by the US and has allowed the US to pillage the economy. Initially, NAFTA led to a flood of cheap US manufactures, which rapidly produced a balance of payments problem, devaluation of the Peso, and in early 1995 the US had to arrange a \$50bn rescue package. Austerity measures, cuts in government spending and astronomical interest rates (as high as 120%) followed. This brought about the ruin of the local petty bourgeoisie and the slashing of the state sector. A massive restructuring of the economy occurred. For the present this has stabilised the economic situation but the repayments on the debts consume approximately 29% of the GNP and debt repayment is due in 2003, so further upheavals lie ahead.

US capital has flowed into Mexico in vast amounts attracted by the starvation wages that can be paid. Wage rates can be as low as \$0.57 per hour! These developments have also led to a surge of emigration, both legal and illegal, from Mexico to the US. Because Mexican workers will work for much less than US workers, the immigrants are forcing wages down. All these factors lead to a flow of surplus value from the Mexican working class to the US bourgeoisie. This is of course increasing the profitability of US capital.

The victory of Fox also ended 70 years of domination of Mexican politics by the "Institutional Revolutionary Party" (PRI) who represent the left wing of the Mexican bourgeoisie. The PRI has described Fox's programme as "a model for social disaster." This is, of course, pure hypocrisy, since it was the PRI who took Mexico into GATT in 1986, carried out the reforms needed to achieve entry to NAFTA, and joined

NAFTA in 1993. After the economic disaster of 1994 it was the PRI who implemented the policies of privatisation, cutting state spending and restructuring which the PAN continues today. As elsewhere in the world the distinction between the so-called left and right of the bourgeoisie's political apparatus is increasingly meaningless. Both carry out the policies demanded by international capitalism and in the case of Mexico this means the US.

## Looming Social Revolt

However, a disaster of some sort is looming. The massive economic changes which have occurred since the '80's, have brought massive social changes. These in turn, have led to widespread social movements which, though they have not yet taken an anti-capitalist direction clearly have the potential to do so. At present the PRI is no longer able to channel these protests into the harmless paths of nationalism and struggles for nationalisation. Other bourgeois forces are, however, arising to defuse this explosive situation.

The liberalisation of the Mexican economy has devastated the living standards of the masses, whilst the bourgeoisie has consolidated Mexico as one of the most attractive countries for Direct Foreign Investment. It is now the third most popular place in the world for such investment (after China and Brazil), and attracted 13 161.5 million dollars during 2000, 13.8% more than in 1999. Of course, most of this investment came from the U.S. (8938.5 million dollars) followed by Spain (1570 million dollars). The Mexican bourgeoisie expects to attract 15 000 million dollars in 2001 and by the end of the Fox Presidency (each Presidency lasts 6 years), 20 000 million dollars.

Of the 13 million plus foreign dollars invested in 2000, more than half went to the *maquiladora*<sup>1</sup> industries, in particular to those sectors dealing with metal products, machinery and plastic

and chemical products. Conditions in these *maquiladoras* are notoriously terrible. 70% of the workforce is female. The working week exceeds 60 hours. Tiredness and monotony lead to high staff turnover, but the workers' search for better conditions is largely fruitless. Most *maquiladora* workers are paid by the hour, there is no overtime rate for those who need to earn more, no holiday pay, Christmas bonus etc. There are no unions and dismissal for any form of resistance, or other circumstances such as pregnancy, is easy for the bosses, troublesome workers are blacklisted so other enterprises will not offer them work. Of course this contravenes the 1917 Constitution and other labour laws, but passing and applying laws are different things, more so in Mexico where corruption and bribery persist en masse.

Even the most committed promoters of liberalisation have to recognise the corrosive effect this has had on living standards of all but the wealthiest. Speaking at the recent Mexican reunion of the World Economic Forum (February 2001), the Governor of the Bank of Mexico, Guillermo Ortiz Martinez, admitted that "Globalisation had left many people marginalised." Over 40% of Mexico's economically active population scratch out a living in the so-called "informal sector". In Latin America "40% of the population live in poverty"<sup>2</sup> and wealth distribution<sup>3</sup> "is one of the worst in the world"..."the coefficients of education, health and infant mortality" in the region are worse than "not only the OECD countries, but those of Southeast Asia."

On 27th of February, again at the World Economic Forum, another Government official<sup>4</sup> recognised that in Mexico, 40 million live in poverty, 43% of the population. He also exposed the deplorable condition of the 62 indigenous groups<sup>5</sup> "whilst the national average of illiteracy is 10.46%, in the Indigenous communities the figure is 43%. 75% of the country's indigenous population do not complete primary school, as com-

pared to 36% of the rest of the population. 83.6% of infant mortality is due to intestinal illness, similar to the situation in Africa.”

This situation of sharp economic and political change has produced signs of mass action. Sadly, this is still channelled into ineffective democratic channels, such as the multiple small parties which continue to spring up like mushrooms, or terrorist type organisations, often seeking radical reform and justice for the particularly oppressed indigenous peoples. The Zapatista march (the Zapatista Army of National Liberation is one of 14 armed organisations operating in Mexico) from the poor Southeast to the capital has been able to attract mass audiences with its powerfully attractive, if utopian critique of a society which has left so many in the abyss. Assemblies of 70 000 people have been achieved, where sub-comandante Marcos and his masked fellow comandantes, often borrowing Marxist phraseology. Che Guevara's famous portrait is often seen on t-shirts worn by masked Zapatista commandantes at the public assemblies and Marcos threatens the government with armed struggle on a massive scale if the condition of the Indigenous population is not improved. If the goal of meaningful reform is impossible within the confines of capitalist decadence, and Marcos has no project for the only means to go beyond capitalism's limits, the construction of the International Communist Party for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. The success of the EZLN in attracting mass attention can be explained by the enor-

mity of the misery and the yearning for an alternative society by significant sectors of the population. However the scale of the media attraction the EZLN has attracted shows how the ruling class is able to use this movement as a safety valve to prevent the working class from taking a path that would genuinely threaten capitalism. The EZLN mixes Marxist phraseology, religion, mysticism, nationalism<sup>6</sup> and romanticism. All this serves as an ideological smokescreen which diverts the dispossessed from an authentic, proletarian spearheaded revolutionary project, whilst Marcos and his merry men reject the taking of state power, opting, at least as far as the propaganda goes, to be a pressure group on the authorities. It is widely expected that a left wing political party will emerge out of the EZLN to add more variety to the democratic charade.

Years of nationalism, together with illusions in democracy and the possibility of an emergence of a “New” Mexico, following the downfall of the long PRI hegemony, and all the familiar problems such as Stalinist, Castroite falsifications of Marxism block the road to the development of communist consciousness. Marxists recognise that if misery alone were sufficient to create a revolutionary proletariat, the spectre of communism would have made many more appearances than has in fact been the case. Nevertheless, the Mexican case confirms the validity of the Marxist analysis, that concludes that development for the greater part of humanity is an impossibility under capitalism.<sup>7</sup> Globalisation has only in-

tensified all the negative effects of capitalism, it is leading to the final, unavoidable intensification of capitalism's crisis. It is a solution to capitalism's problems. The only project, which does not entail the worsening of all social conditions, is the revolutionary project, the working class version of globalisation, International Communism. If the first steps are to be taken along this road it is necessary for Mexican communists to expose the illusions of the bourgeois programmes, particularly nationalism and reform of capitalism, pedalled by the Mexican left. As in other parts of the world it is necessary for communists who understand this to form a communist organisation to provide a communist beacon for today's struggles. The IBRP exists to assist in the construction of such an organisation and we invite Mexican communists who agree with the politics expressed above to contact us.

## Notes

1 The *maquiladoras* or *maquilas* are factories working on contract and belonging to transnational companies, that are able to take advantage of extremely low wage levels, exemption from customs duties, and the proximity of the US to which their products are exported. (From *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Dec 1999, “Free Trade Across an Iron Curtain”)

2 Less than a dollar a day according to President Fox, speaking on 27th of February.

3 In Latin America the top twenty percent receives 12 times more income than the bottom 20%. In Asia the figure is 4 times more.

4 Xóchitl Gálvez Ruiz.

5 Approximately 10 million people, 10% of the population, living on an average 10 pesos per day.

6 The Mexican flag and national anthem are regular features of the EZLN's public spectacles.

7 Decades ago, Mexico was held up as a model for other “developing countries” to follow.

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## Our Basic Positions

1. We aim to become part of the future world working class party which will guide the class struggle towards the establishment of a stateless, classless, moneyless society without exploitation, national frontiers or standing armies and in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all (Marx): Communism.

2. Such a society will need a revolutionary state for its introduction. This state will be run by workers' councils, consisting of instantly recallable delegates from every

section of the working class. Their rule is called the dictatorship of the proletariat because it cannot exist without the forcible overthrow and keeping down of the capitalist class worldwide.

3. The first stage in this is the political organisation of class-conscious workers and their eventual union into an international political party for the promotion of world revolution.

4. The Russian October Revolution of 1917 remains a brilliant inspiration for us. It showed that workers could overthrow the

capitalist class. Only the isolation and decimation of the Russian working class destroyed their revolutionary vision of 1917. What was set up in Russia in the 1920's and after was not communism but centrally planned state capitalism. There have as yet been no communist societies anywhere in the world.

5. The International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party was founded by the heirs of the Italian Left who tried to fight the political degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the Comintern in the 1920's. We are continuing the task which the Russian Revolution promised but failed to achieve — the freeing of the workers of the world and the establishment of communism. Join us!

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